

*That Day:  
The Ghosts of Nine-Eleven*

*By Orrin Schwab*



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Baltimore

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# I

I was at the post office, strong and relaxed  
air was clean sun peaked through high clouds  
it was a crisp velvety day, when New York sometimes feels  
like New England

Queens, where I live soundly, mottled with neighborhoods  
like Brooklyn but different, buses drive down Main Street  
to the far end of the world, cold lobsters and pigs heads and noodles  
where once were aging department stores  
pool halls and the factories that border Shea and LGA,  
its sulfurous basin, permanently stabbed with the sheet metal of industry  
gnawing at the suburban grass of Whitestone

Asia peeks through the cement of the highway ramps  
that capture the fleeing cars burning into the arteries of the city  
bridges soar over the vast spread of brown and red buildings,  
innocent green parks with water fountains and children's slides  
in the distance the elaborate OZ of Manhattan  
silver skyline penetrating the air and the cosmos  
speaking to God

on that day, which was as innocent  
as any other, I left the post office  
I drove serenely, confidently, blissfully  
I sat on the road  
waiting for the light to turn on Main Street

over Flushing Meadow the sky billowed  
its strange towering blackness looked like a thunderstorm

but I sat complacent and alone  
then a man pointed, his beard wagging  
with desperate anger  
he paused to accuse the sky  
as if to say “you have done what you have done”

but I did not understand  
I had no reason to believe  
that thunderstorms were the ruin of humans

even as it spread over the horizon of the trees  
and the buildings in Forest Hills  
even as the storm looked much more like the smoke of fire

I still sat till the light changed, I watched the smoke curl along  
harmless, odorless, silent  
I ran my car down to the open space of the park  
to the highways pouring high tech steel and blood  
through the veins of the country  
I was on that road tough ponderous stretch of cement and iron  
plying over the cold wastes of Flushing Bay  
chemicals leaking into the green tumescence  
bacterium they say will inherit from us  
the land and the water  
I ran down that expressway  
and then the world cracked open  
it was cracking as I took long breaths  
as I learned, as I comprehended  
my car radio full of the surreal  
the crashing of the universe  
electronic waves sucked into  
each other collapsing in the sobs  
of desperate people, it was as if the world had died  
the soul of the country lost in the shaking ground  
I sat that day and watched

I sat that day and heard  
I sat that day and felt the depths of my city's darkness  
I sat that day and sensed life pulsing above me  
pulsing below me  
coursing through my blood and bones  
the energy of life dissipating  
collapsing in the skies  
thundering through the earth  
the billowing smoke  
came out of the towers  
every particle stuck with life  
every plume full of a million thoughts  
full of a million moments  
full of tapestries, full of mosaics,  
the towers shuddered  
and those fires brought down the steel  
jet fuel engulfed its pillars  
melting the hearts out of  
those manmade mountains

Himalayan and proud  
the mighty structures  
burned with the fury of  
New York  
struck that morning  
felled like thousand foot oak trees  
they cried at their immolation  
coming down fast onto  
the pavements  
a holocaust with  
a million tons of steel  
and cement  
it burned into the ground  
Manhattan struck  
by human missiles

it was that day that  
the world died and was reborn  
shakily into the still crisp day  
that felt like New England  
the air hung with souls of the dead  
who waited for the angels of their God to take them  
visions of the creator  
in all the languages of the buried and burned  
chanted Hebrew and the King's English, Arabic, Spanish,  
French, German, Urdu and Hindi  
chanted in the tongues of Amerindians  
chanted in the tongues of Africans  
chanted in the tongues of Europeans  
chanted in the tongues of Asians  
chanted in paroxysms of rage  
spread through the world the sulfurous odors  
spread through the world the raptures of the flames  
blood and ash mixed in the fires of melting steel beams  
blood and ash immersed in the combustion of time  
echoes of the rescuers consumed in the fuel  
echoes of lives fulsome with children  
with teasing play of toddlers  
with brothers and sisters  
with small pleasures of the morning  
with tears of weddings in colored photos  
with tears of the newborn and the unborn  
all that is precious in wisps of memories  
they chanted as the hard mass came down  
chanting to the grieving  
chanting to the vengeful  
sounds buried in the souls of humans

## II

those eyes deadly searching morose  
evil transparent urgent grasping eyes  
destructive robot like saturnine eyes

they were on the cover of the news magazine  
large dark pupils pressing inward  
fears of the fanatic circling the foreheads  
wrapping chills around the ears and the lips  
of the reader who saw in those lost rigid looks  
the angel of death, can you see inside him?  
can you see underneath the stony olive skin  
underneath the intellectual façade  
the depth of his suicidal mission  
dedicated to jihad, holy war  
the meaning of his acts were etched in  
his mind, in the strange palate of his language  
the sounds trumpeting multiple meanings of sacred duty

he was nothing to us before that day  
before the planes were struck by the men  
who swore their oath to God to carry out a holy mission  
of vengeance, of anger, of blood, of searing  
angry warriors enraptured by the songs of their faith  
by the rhythms of the scripture  
by the presence of a history that stood before them  
a thousand years was only a year  
a presence where the prophet stood in front of them  
as if he had left just a day before

on that morning the men prayed for the right to take arms  
against the oppressor against the decadent and the impure  
against the challengers to the faith  
from one end of the world to the other  
but on this day it was the towers  
mighty impregnable monuments  
to the essence of power  
to the centrality of the world  
measured in the units of digits  
for the deaths of those inscribed within  
by the blood oath of the warriors  
fighters for the faith  
glory of God glory to Allah  
glory to the martyrs  
who took the planes seized the jets and drove them  
like bullets into the walls  
of the great skyscrapers  
into the hearts of the energy  
that moves the heart of the world  
words penetrated them  
like bullets like arrows pointed into their  
cerebral lobes pointing the  
deep fissures of culture and history  
into the reality cast in the shadows  
of the buildings that towered over  
the Hudson river its muscular arms pushing up to  
the sky and penetrating the heavens

an Arab born in the language of the Middle East  
born in the soul of the desert  
the language of memory of power and revenge  
of emotion burning in the heart unfiltered  
unburdened by the intellect  
in the souls of the people  
in the souls of the clans

in the souls of the nations  
irradiating out toward the center of the world  
outward  
to the powers covering the waters of the earth  
and the dark blue expanse of the sky  
manmade powers invisible sublime  
digital forces cascading through the stratosphere

these men driven with the hypnotic words  
of the leader whose face stuck on the front  
of the news magazines, a trophy to the evil that had fallen  
the firemen didn't know the man with the strange eyes  
the policemen didn't know the man  
nor did the soldiers and the officers  
who fell in the corridors of the Pentagon  
no one knew them or saw them  
save their omniscient trackers who had lost them  
they would never comprehend these firemen, the rescuers who disappeared  
within the intimidating façades, the giant buildings shot flames high  
into the air  
as if they had been struck in their arteries  
those brave men who never came down  
would never learn about the nineteen soldiers  
who rammed the human bombs into the center  
of the world, into the center pulsing with the breath  
of the world, pulsing with the blood of the country

### III

At the sight of the ground  
where the towers were destroyed  
that they named ground zero  
the first moment of the new age

found itself with rescuers  
thousands of them  
descending like locusts upon the hulking mass  
pushing through the remains  
with impenetrable determination  
trying to save any that could be  
any that had survived

the country saw the towers and saw the planes  
they heard about the one that hit  
the military and the one that went down  
over the forests of Pennsylvania  
slamming into a field with the speed  
of a midair collision

the world saw the planes as they  
attacked as they wounded the heart  
as they wounded the arms and the legs  
and the eyes and the voices shrilled  
with fear and with revenge  
from one place to another

war raised the colors that flew quickly from the tops of post offices  
from single family houses and apartment windows

from the windows of cars and the windows  
of schools and on office buildings the colors  
wrapped themselves on people's heads, on  
their backs and their legs and the braces of children's teeth

the warriors had cut through the soft anonymous America  
cut into the meat and the vessels of the animal  
severing an artery that burst onto the pavements  
blood carried in quarts and buckets

foreigners shook with anger they too watched  
they watched the implosions of the steel  
they watched the smoke and the heat from the underground fires  
as the rescuers worked like demons like heroes  
worked for days in the noxious air, at the sight of the  
holocaust, at the sight of the burial ground  
holy ground, hollowed ground  
the foreigners raised the colors in Poland  
and in Great Britain and in Germany  
and everywhere the flag flew and the  
sounds of the American soul were heard  
the sounds of America touched the mountains  
touched the skies over the continents  
and children carried candles  
and voices moved through the cool air

for a moment all the lights of the world  
swept across the oceans and the mountains  
and the deserts and from the wastes of ground zero  
and from the bones of those buried under the halls of  
the Pentagon, the earth took repentance  
the people gathered in common  
the leaders moved as one

for a moment races didn't matter ages and classes didn't matter  
the colors rained across the stony shores of Long Island

across the highways and the tunnels and the bridges  
across the land and the mountain passes and the deserts  
and all that was physical and all that was ethereal  
had merged into the consciousness of the particular moment  
of the moment of the sacred and searing second when it happened  
when all came together when there was a  
a singularity of minds, a singularity of thoughts  
a singularity of hands, a singularity of eyes  
a singularity of humanness  
a binding of all things, a synchrony of physics of chemistry of biology

a world that inverted upon itself  
searched for what it most wanted  
searched as all humankind should know  
for the truth buried  
for the truth that lay in the rubble  
for the truth that no one could understand

## IV

On the ninetieth floor  
A young woman succumbed, she left her desk stumbled  
Across to the stairwell, fell as the smoke came from all sides  
When the speeding liner hit just below it exploded and within seconds  
All was lit with flames she died quickly with the others

And when her tower came down she was standing on the ground  
Weightless invisible a facsimile  
But twenty-three, dark haired beauty, her facsimile watched as the men  
On the ground pushed through the rubble  
Saw a coworker who survived by a miracle  
Pinned under a giant beam and slab of wall  
She pushed with all her might trying to force a fireman standing at  
the perimeter  
Wanted to push him toward her trapped under the wreckage

The fireman was motionless, then he moved away  
She was powerless, even as a ghost an image of what she was  
But she was there she saw everything around her  
And hundreds and now thousands of others  
Who lingered on the grounds watching the living  
Watching life she could hardly know having just left college, having  
just begun to work begun to live as an adult should live as she saw  
the sirens  
And the cell phones and masks and hoses and  
The army converging on the site, converging in a panic of determination

So it was for her that she learned more, about life in the hours after  
death

Than the years she was growing into a slim vibrant woman who  
wanted to

Teach in the Third World who wanted to do justice and learn who  
wanted to experience

The fullness of humans struggling with the trials of a world immersed  
in change

Immersed in opposites a world that was both desperate and inviting  
Morbid and deeply satiated, engaging with

Wealth and opportunity a bifurcated world that she had only a glimpse of  
Before the suicide mission sped just below her

Pounding into the wall and burning everything

She had only a glimpse a taste of it

Like love but a glimpse in the boy she loved

Who made love to her the night before

Who brought her deep into his body and soul

She would see him later at the funeral crying with her parents

With her brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles

School friends and friends of the family

Neighbors and church goers they would grieve without her

Having disappeared into the mass

# V

He was one of the “muscle” men  
Olive skinned with curly jet black hair  
No one could have mistaken him but for  
What he was, a man from the Middle East  
He was from the land of holy to the Muslims  
Holy to the followers of the faith  
He was following the will of the prophet  
the will of Allah, the will of God the Redeemer  
He believed, he professed, he understood  
He visualized in his mind, his language  
In the constructs of experience  
The constructs of memory, the constructs of culture  
In the bones of his nation, in the marrow of his people

So he thought, so he felt in his gut  
So he saw in his serving eyes

Like his leader on the plane, like his leader deep in the mountains  
sitting at the far reaches of the earth, sitting deep in the mountains  
that sweep  
across the top of South Asia

across the land of the Aryans, across the land of Alexander  
across the land of Tamerlane, across the land of the Marahijis  
across the land of the Sultans, across the land of the British Raj  
across the land of the Russians, across the land of the American  
Empire  
across the land that belongs to the people  
in cold desolate mountain caves the leader sipped tea and planned

calmly, purposefully, convinced of his path to God, he gave his missions  
preaching the fatwa  
preaching against the Crusaders and the Jews  
preaching against the Makers of the World

Americans saw him as what he was  
Nothing more or less

they could never know him  
Like a brother, like a kinsmen  
Like a believer, a follower of the prophet  
A warrior who would go to paradise  
They were not of the prophet  
Believers in Christ, believers in Moses  
And they were unbelievers, idolaters, who lit the desert  
with palaces of neon, of liquor and women  
their women, like harlots danced for them  
showed their naked sculpted bodies  
in front of them as they drank scotch and rum  
as they fell into stupors  
fell into the madness that they  
knew would happen the next day  
when they would board the planes  
when they would seize the strength  
of God and take the planes into the buildings  
The Americans and the Wahabi  
polar opposites born into the wrong century  
Born into the wrong cycle of history  
But born nonetheless searching out the land of the Americans  
The plastic façades of restaurants, motels  
Their unconcerned faces looking at him for only what he could pay  
He came and they let him in  
Despite the warnings, despite the tracking, despite his foreign ways  
His foreign looks his foreign thoughts  
They let him move with his fellow soldiers

Moving from one end of the vast country  
To the other, working carefully to plan the  
Moment when history would sit in the palm  
Of their hands, and the world would know them  
And their families would know them  
He followed the word of Allah followed his leader onto the airplane  
And when the critical moment arrived  
He slit the throat of the pilot  
So the leader could take command  
So the leader who knew the mission  
Took the plane over the Hudson  
North of the city, took the plane  
In a calculated dash as military aircraft  
Scrambled to meet them  
He held fast to the mission  
A mission born of the sacred duty  
To destroy the enemies of the faith  
The enemies of the people who died by the thousands, and by the millions  
Who died holding the Koran in their hands  
Who died in their mothers' arms  
Who died facing the tanks, the missiles of the oppressors  
Who gave their lives for the word of almighty  
He learned that he would die on that plane  
He would give himself and he would be taken  
He would follow the prayers of the all powerful  
The prophet would be with him  
They attacked, as they made the jihad against  
The greatest of all enemies

In the fortitude of a young man giving up his life  
He would not fail, he would not let the passengers seize the cabin  
His duty required him to defend the will of God to the last ounce of  
his strength  
He would do the will of the leader  
Who reads daily from the Koran in his mountain redoubts

Who understood his sacrifice and blessed him even now as  
He struggled as he felt the power of Allah  
The plane swung to the far side of the harbor  
And went straight, like a bullet  
Like a dagger into the heart of a giant  
Spilling his blood over the city  
Spilling the hate of a thousand generations  
Of a thousand enemies as the plane hit  
He felt nothing the passengers, frantic  
Crying, pleading, horrified the huge sound of the collision  
Blackness and then nothing

He was free in that blackness he thought he felt a breeze  
But his senses were gone

He saw nothing, he felt nothing, he heard nothing, he tasted nothing  
He smelled nothing he thought he was afraid, but he could not feel it  
Disembodied, he seemed to float  
But he knew he could sense it  
He wanted to see the world he wanted to look down at the destruction  
To realize what he had done but there was nothing

*Was this all? he thought. Am I only to  
Think? Is this all there is after body has left?  
Surely, there must be something else.  
Surely, Allah is waiting to see me.*

But there was nothing, for what seemed like ages.  
It seemed as if he was there, alone, conscious  
But empty  
Conscious, but without a world of any kind  
Conscious, but without desires, without fears,  
Without wants, without pleasures, without pain,  
Without all that he had before  
Without himself as he knew

He could only remember  
But the memories were deep  
He saw the desert landscape of his homeland  
The mosques and the palaces of the princes  
And he saw the holy cities  
And where he grew up  
Memorizing the words of the Quran  
Memorizing the deeds and the actions of the prophet  
And his followers  
And he remembered his family  
He remembered his mother and his father  
He could see they were proud of him  
That he had martyred himself for God

Then the blackness lifted  
And he thought he might be going to meet the prophet  
Meet all the holy men that had served the prophet  
He would meet all of his grandfathers and their fathers and grandfathers  
And all the seed of this family until the time of Ibrahim

But as the darkness faded into an opaque gray  
He saw he was at the sight of the buildings now  
Rubble with rescuers frantically moving around searching  
For signs of life just below the huge mounds of wreckage  
He walked up to a fireman who pulled huge pieces of cement  
And charred fragments of glass, wood and drywall  
He worked frantically for hours, his strength coming from an inner source

With awe he watched perspiration pouring out of sweat glands  
He watched him work with the strength of his forearms  
Muscles pulsing, without rest, pulling, dragging through the wreckage  
Others arrived, with the heavy thrusting machinery for construction  
The iron and construction workers joined  
They worked at the same pace, desperate, furious, determined

The fireman said he had lost his brother and fifteen of his friends  
There were sixteen of them now from two firehouses,  
buried under the massive blackened heaps  
there would be Irish and Italian and Hispanic funerals  
bagpipes and church music, priests and ministers would  
preside, the mayor would attend  
the olive-skinned muscle man felt for him  
the survivor, who lost his brother and the buddies  
he cooked steak with every night  
the fireman kept talking, hoping that if he did that  
a miracle would save one of those that were missing  
if he talked and talked then one would come back  
death would spare just one to come back to his wife and children

he heard this, standing twenty feet away, invisible  
He felt the steel knots in his stomach  
The crushing of his chest and his throat  
The feelings ran through him with transparent force  
With the power of a hundred men beating on his bones  
He felt the fireman's grief  
So stunning he thought  
Since he no longer had a stomach, a throat or a chest  
only the memory of them  
only the feelings that he could conger  
in his post-mortem  
He didn't know why  
He thought he had done his duty for his people  
And for the faith of Mohammed  
For the faith of the more than a billion people  
Who bowed to Mecca and to God

## VI

When the giant plumes of smoke were gone  
Swept away into the sky thousands converged an army searching  
for the remains of the dead  
the flag flew everywhere, symbol of unity, freedom, power  
symbol of loyalty, defiance and strength  
symbol of resolution symbol of perseverance  
symbol of victory and redemption  
but the dead remained watching as they found the flag in the rubble  
raised it with honor the power of the republic swelling  
tightening, crying, burning in the mourning  
eyes of the men who retrieved the remains of the fallen  
yet the perished had not left at all  
they stood at the excavation  
at the morgue where the towers stood  
now blasted into the ground  
they stood and watched their relatives  
and their friends holding signs, asking questions  
hoping for the slightest of possibilities  
but they stayed and watched  
having left the earth with violence, they would not go  
they stayed as the cranes came and the bulldozers  
they watched body parts and intact bodies, some their own  
they watched the salvage of what was left of them and of everything  
of everything that was there in the vast buildings now shattered to  
the ground

When the war started they remained  
Walking through the streets of lower Manhattan  
Walking the land of the living

The survivors came to the site of the destruction  
And tourists watched the mangled remains of the buildings  
burnt and ruptured made them feel the presence of the ghosts who  
prowled the area  
walking out onto the water as dusk came onto the Hudson  
dead firemen walked to the center of the harbor  
and climbed onto cargo ship headed for the Mediterranean  
the war in Afghanistan had exploded  
American bombers pounded the ground  
their one and two and five thousand pound bombs  
demolished what they hit, the sounds and the lights from the ammunition  
heard across the land, heard and translated into English for American  
newspapers  
heard and recounted from one television broadcast to the next  
one internet message to the next, the bombs hit the caves, hit the bunkers  
and the men disintegrated, destroyed, annihilated, human bodies  
fragmented by the force of the explosions, by piercing shards of steel  
by the force of old glory seeking revenge

## VII

*I can see the earth now a brilliant globe of blue and brown hues  
the cities glow with electric lights below  
they are like monuments, scattered from one place to the next, from  
one continent and then another commemorating identity, celebrity  
and antiquity, survival and prosperity*

*coming down to the surface everything seems strange, out of place  
people are transparent, floating it seems, as the traffic lights turn red  
and then for what seems like hours, they turn green*

*the cars move, but very slowly*

*I should think that they are in a different world*

*Or dimension, a different universe than the one I stepped in when I  
fell out of*

*The hundredth floor of the building*

*The smoke and flames having consumed me already*

*I preferred the open air for the last seconds of my life*

*The people around me seem to have little understanding*

*Of what the world is truly like now that I can see it, unadorned, unmasked*

*They have little understanding of who and why*

*Or what is truly the nature of things, they cannot see the future*

*they have forgotten most of the past, the living only see the surface,*

*they cannot go underneath the façade of those who engage them*

*they cannot see the depths of relatedness, the depths of  
interconnectedness, the web of energy that flows through the veins  
like blood*

*that gives humans synchronicity of time, of culture, of space, of memory  
synchronicity of the souls that travel through the night sky*

*That walk through the dimensions of the living world*

*With the lucid power of the invisible of the omniscient*

*When the flames shot up against the windows  
I feared death like any other man, reflexively I called my wife  
Who wasn't there, who wasn't there to say goodbye  
To say I love you she was out in the marshes  
Hunting for small fish, she didn't know until it was over  
The world turned immediately, into an awful place, into a dark and  
grieving place  
Where she would cry incessantly at night for years for long after the  
day that I left her  
She would never remarry, though I would have said yes  
She would raise our kids alone  
So young, they would hope to see me as a ghost  
as a faint image they would like to communicate  
If they only could know, they would hope for all of that  
They would hope to see me to feel my spirit in the air  
And to feel the strength of life, to feel the strength of themselves  
The power of living beings sanctifying the earth*

## VIII

When the towers came down New York imploded  
In the heat tiny sparks shot through the atmosphere  
shooting across the continents and oceans it was New York everywhere  
the image of Manhattan floated above the earth and settled over  
Europe and Asia  
New York which speaks 200 languages  
Fell into the homes of villagers who lived miles from the first paved road  
miles from a newspaper New York born in the seventeenth century  
Shot its long accumulated energy across  
The world filling bowls and dishes with pizza, knishes, pork fried rice,  
Haagen-Dazs,  
All the ingredients of the city with blue ceramic plates from Soho  
With bone ivory chopsticks from Chinatown  
Merlot and Cognac from the Village, blue cheese and Brie from Chelsea  
Hot Italian garlic bread and red sauce from Little Italy, Tandori  
Chicken from 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue  
Pork and Beef Ribs from Brooklyn, lobster and sushi from the Upper  
Eastside  
magazines and the newspapers fell over Karachi and Kabul even  
before the air force arrived New Yorker cartoons adorned the hallways  
of official Communist party headquarters in Sinkiang the Village  
Voice was found littered on the streets of Hanoi  
After the towers plunged into the ground dropping through seven  
levels until they nearly broke the sea wall  
New York radio stations played in the Pacific Islands  
The New York Public Library had books allover the beaches in  
Australia and Japan  
The Metropolitan the Guggenheim and the Frick had artwork wash  
up on the shores of the Indian Ocean, fisherman dragged up pieces

of American colonial furniture pieces of Rodin bronzes, in Sri Lanka, original Picassos and Dalis were being sold in bazaars Rembrandts and Titians and Raphaels carefully wrapped were carried in carts

London, a piece of Yankee Stadium had crashed through the side of the British Museum in Paris, half of Shea Stadium had landed near the Louvre

vendors sold hot chestnuts, honey coated cashews and salted doughnut pretzels.

In Berlin, the new Bundestag was covered with subway car advertisements in Spanish

in Liepzig, bagpipes, drums and Irish flags, tropical floats and Puerto Rican state flags

were scattered around the town square the Museum of Natural History had crashed through the main bridge in St. Petersburg its exhibits lying along the banks of the river.

Throughout the world, yellow cabs with New York Taxi and Limousine plates mysteriously appeared and disappeared on the streets of Rome

on the island of Cyprus and the Canary Islands

The Cloisters Museum was spotted on an uninhabited island in the South Pacific

The Bronx High School of Science landed intact in Cairo

Billions of subway tokens were found on the northern Tundra

The Staten Island ferry was docked in Murmansk

Rockefeller Center, somewhat damaged, had landed on the slopes of Mount Everest

All the world had been given New York museums, galleries, libraries, colleges, universities, department stores, restaurants, clubs, ball fields, all the landmarks back to Peter Minuet its people had not left though they remained determined as ever

to rebuild the city to make it even greater that it was before

## IX

nighttime after the towers fell  
the world gathered and pondered America  
they raised one eye to New York  
another to Washington and the path of the navy  
which would take revenge New York was stripped of its élan  
streets across Manhattan hollowed out empty but for the tip of the  
island  
Broadway, and Park, Madison and Sixth  
were deserted, shaken into a grim solitude  
of different shades of gray and black  
a vacuum of cold swirled upwards  
a vacuum of silence fallen over the metropolis  
lost and timorous, speechless, blameless, sorrowful  
came out of all the windows  
baleful and crying mourning those strikes from the sky  
the city fell upon its knees the eyes of New Yorkers  
were glassy, dark and saturnine, without substance, lost in tragedy  
but for the workers who shadowed disaster  
who worked through the dense heat and smoke of hell  
the angels had taken the dead  
but for those who wouldn't leave  
the firemen and the cops patrolled the grounds watching over the  
rescuers  
and the mothers of small children went home to see their babies  
watching them in their beds and cribs the president met with his advisors  
giving orders to prepare for war in the city, the mayor gave instructions  
to seal the bridges and tunnels but they were gone the men who flew  
the jets into the towers disintegrated, cremated in the infernos  
they had created with the joy of going to heaven, as they believed

but the dead of the towers were not all gone they rallied at the battery  
saying in their ghost voices that they would stay and fight  
stay to help the survivors so as the searchlights and cranes worked  
the ghosts stayed at the site helping the rescuers in any way they could  
putting thoughts in their heads to keep going  
finding the living buried underneath the rubble  
and the mothers went to see their babies in New Jersey and Brooklyn  
and Westchester  
they kissed their one-year-olds, and two-year-olds  
they knew they wouldn't feel the kisses  
but they knew they could watch over them  
make them feel safe in a world that had lost its safety make them feel  
secure  
even after they lost their security  
the air that night was cold and swirled upwards in the sky  
the streets were empty but for those who walked alone  
walking in the sparse lands of twilight  
walking in the invisible realm of the night

# X

numbers can often be hard  
especially if you can't imagine them  
the kids who could see the numbers  
memorized the multiplication and division tables  
were able to conquer mixed fractions and percentages  
then on to algebra, Euclidean geometry, trigonometry  
polynomials, probabilities, integrals, differentials, matrices and so  
on all a question of imagination all a question of structure  
all a question of symmetry computation really is a skill of visualization  
scientists say the brain is all computation  
mathematics and music and poetry  
all rhythmic flows tonal harmonies  
the mind is in touch with the sky with the earth and the oceans  
microtubules of the synapses burrow down to the smallest points  
to the quantum space of inner time to the vibrating strings the creators  
according to Aquinas, making something from nothing  
on that day on the other side of the river  
In Jersey City the classrooms were busy doing arithmetic  
the children worked slowly with their pencils working hard on the  
numbers  
the numbers came five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten...  
when they reached the highest numbers they could  
a flash struck across the river a boy shouted, "look! look!"  
the class leaped to the windows  
riveted on the huge tower that looked like a giant cigarette  
"It's on fire! It's on fire!" the students could not contain  
their fascination they oogled and gawked  
until the second plane which they saw shoot across the harbor  
hit the second tower and more flames and smoke filled

the sky the horizon quickly filled around them  
with the dark haze from the smoking flames  
mathematics is used by engineers to measure the strength of buildings  
and to measure the speed and fuel requirements  
of commercial jets it is used to set the codes that control the planes  
to track them on radar and to build the machines  
powered by huge engines with enormous fuel tanks  
and it was arithmetic that was used to gauge time  
from the fall of one tower to the other as the children watched  
dumbfounded  
and then with fear they didn't watch the second one come down  
they were sent home  
in the days that came the children painted and drew cut pictures  
creating with their hands and their eyes and their minds  
a way to recreate the buildings that came down  
they learned more than arithmetic indeed they learned the power of  
their senses they learned the meaning of being alive the true meaning  
of numbers

# XI

He was visiting, it was a great city  
He thought as the plane made its descent to Kennedy  
Flying over the sound on his right he glimpsed  
Manhattan his ears pulled back  
Midtown shown like a collection of jewels  
Each one flashing its brilliance the next day he walked the  
streets of the upper eastside marveled at Park Avenue at Madison  
and then Fifth  
Paris was as elegant but the energy caught him  
Around he went through the city on the brightest sunniest  
Day of the year the city was transparent English, rough and tumbling  
Fell past his ears used to French  
But he loved it, all of it  
When he went to the Village and to the Battery and then later, when  
he learned about Brooklyn he visited Park Slope  
walked through Prospect Park  
thinking he had reached an urban nirvana  
so rich, mysterious, in a giant country, he thought, he worked as a  
cook, then a waiter and a doorman wearing a red coat and white gloves  
he played music in Williamsburg and on the lower eastside played  
jazz and blues  
going to Chicago and the Bayou to New Orleans and Los Angeles  
but returning to the silver of land full of riches sounds and sights and  
the tickle of the language he loved pizza and barbecues, Mexican  
and Thai restaurants, to augment his French palate, he took pictures  
and painted the city laughed with girlfriends  
As he drew their naked portraits  
He was having breakfast the sky was clearing on that perfect day  
he sat there talking with his friend who came from Paris and he

wanted to show him  
what it was like living in New York  
he showed him Brooklyn and then on the other side they saw the  
length of Broadway all the way to the Grand Concourse where he  
went to watch baseball  
the world champions he pointed out toward the east  
toward Long Island where he went in his 91 Honda  
drove with his girlfriend to Long Beach then out to Suffolk where  
she grew up  
Montauk was the end of the universe he told his friend who had  
never been to America  
From Montauk the ocean went out to the horizon thousands of  
kilometers to the coast of Brittany in the off-season the dune roads  
were romantic  
The land was gorgeous in the fall with trees turning color  
And the ocean soft and quiet a paradise he said a city born on the  
coast of America  
a land far richer than its image it nourished him, fed his art  
they drank champagne and ate omelets and watched the city as it  
began he sipped his glass and toasted his friend turning just in time  
to see the speeding bullet  
the plane like a giant bird as it headed toward them  
in Paris, his parents sat in awe, in New York, he passed down  
with the others moving into the darkness moving into the tunnel  
seeing the light as it shone in the silence of the dead.

## XII

At night the ghosts watched over the site, continuing the vigil  
watching the workers sift through the debris  
occasionally they found intact bodies  
most often not only parts of them  
most often they loaded huge piles of fragments onto trucks to be dumped  
sifted through in New Jersey  
yet the ghosts, like the living kept their vigil  
but others wandered, they could not rest, or bear the sight of the  
destruction  
they searched  
they searched for meaning, they searched the world  
it is easy for ghosts, who can circle the earth  
who ride up to the top of the atmosphere  
effortlessly floating across continents, moving through radio waves  
or transmission lines, a stream of electrons, a beam of photons  
ghosts do not obey the laws of physics, they don't have to  
the ghosts walked through the open doors, of time and found their  
way to the desert  
they saw the men climbing up through the mountains  
thin men with beards and woolen caps, they could have been any age  
carrying weapons their eyes piercing the sun with fear  
over the horizon blasts of rapid gunfire hit the side of the mountain  
like massive thunderbolts  
the ghosts, who were brokers and managers and secretaries, watched  
the mountainside light up with fire  
two boys, hardly older than fifteen were blown apart by a shell that  
split them in two their souls shot out of their bodies racing upwards  
to the heavens  
"come back," the ghosts said

but the young boys praised Allah a chariot came and they rode over  
the horizon

the New Yorkers watched as the helicopter  
circled overhead spraying the ground with bullets the size of  
a man's fist walking into the cave  
they listened to the men talk nervously  
in a language they never heard before  
but ghosts can understand any language  
they were fighting for their country  
or their tribe or their village or their family or themselves  
they fought all the time because the foreigners had invaded  
from the north their tanks rumbled through  
the valleys crushing them crushing the blood out of their veins  
crushing the land and the people

"they were Russians who came to save their friends fellow communists—  
they came when the resistance began"

the ghosts could not comprehend what was going on in that world  
it was too complicated they didn't want to stay  
they didn't know why or how, they had walked through time  
to the country that lay in ruins now from twenty years of tanks and  
bombs and missiles

they didn't care to know  
when they walked through the White House  
read the secret files and learned the war began there  
even before the tanks rumbled down from the north  
even before the villagers bled and died  
in the mountains, burned alive with napalm

*"I don't care,"* said a woman who was twenty-six when she left life  
"I don't care about this, it means nothing"

she worked on the eighty-eighth floor till that morning when the sky  
exploded  
living in Queens near the Throgsneck, her family were devout  
she went to church and parochial school  
every day dressed in her uniform  
she sang in the choir, she studied liturgy  
she prayed to Mary and to Jesus took communion  
went to confession, with blonde hair and green eyes  
she was a cheerleader with long legs and firm breasts  
rounded hips and skin porcelain white  
she went to church every day in college  
she went to church after college  
went to retreats studied and learned Catholic doctrine  
she had clear fresh green eyes thick red lips and strawberry blonde hair  
that fell in waves on her back, her teeth were whiter than her skin  
large perfect teeth that captured her beautiful smile  
before the plane hit her desk was full  
her computer ranging through the financial figures  
plugging numbers and statistics at light speed  
she was on the phone with three people

“Why don’t you care? Kathy? Don’t you see  
These people are going to die  
Just like we did that morning  
In the ugly blast of something hitting them  
They are people, too.”

He was her colleague sat sixty feet away in his cubicle  
he would work hard but every few minutes  
he couldn’t resist a peek at the girl he loved  
he had gone to church, too.  
gone all his life grew up in Boston  
tall, six-four, red hair  
Irish like her wanted to marry a girl like her

a girl with soft perfumed skin, silky hair and gorgeous eyes  
who would have three children live far out in New Jersey  
with a big house they would be all family  
all connected with Thanksgiving and Christmas  
Full of turkey and wine and Irish beer  
Full of warmth with Christmas masses  
And Easter with confirmations  
And weddings and long family trips  
Camping, skiing and touring Europe

He saw that at his desk in the back of his mind  
He saw beauty stretching over the horizon and into the future  
He wanted her dressed in a white gown surrounded by beautiful  
bridesmaids and flowers as their proud parents watched them  
but then the plane hit in a moment, it was gone  
he found himself floating, he was on the ground watching  
the firemen walk single file through the doors of the tower  
straight up the stairs climbing up eighty floors to the fire

## XIII

He was at his desk working when the first tower was hit  
A strong man six-four he jumped to the window  
Saw the flames and smoke jerked back  
Not knowing what to make sense of it

Born in '52 he was drafted in '70  
Went overseas to the war taking on the peoples army with  
His M-16 and a few grenades the marines  
Supplied him with the combat he remembered  
Every hour of every day his mind clicking  
He suppressed it he wanted to live  
Wanted to be normal which he was now thirty years  
After he landed at Kennedy airport in his uniform and went home  
to his parents house in Monmouth  
When he saw the fire in the next tower  
Vietnam came to him a thunderbolt through  
his mind synapses working overtime  
Floods of fire and smoke and the rounds from the assault guns  
Napalm fireballs in the jungle  
Now he was a vice president in charge of the entire floor  
At that moment he had to take actions like an executive  
but for a second he was three people the soldier shaking in the high reeds  
waiting for the enemy with small dark eyes and thin lips  
just a few yards away just a few milliseconds from oblivion  
now he was also the kid in his parents backyard playing basketball  
his mother telling him to come in and wash for dinner  
and he was the man who sat on the high floor in the tower  
he was a husband and he was a father of four  
and he ran that floor full of technicians and clerks

full of secretaries and first line managers  
there he was tall and graying, middle-aged  
but also a kid with a ducktail but also a young private with a crewcut  
lean, muscular, quick he knew when the plane hit that there  
would be another one something else would happen  
something that would destroy everything around him  
he moved like a cat one cubicle to the next  
“get out,” he said, “get out of the building now!”  
He shouted he ordered them out  
He told them to leave the building at once  
Taking the elevator down to the lobby a thousand feet down  
They looked at him with the eyes of obedience  
But they wondered why they should go down into the chaos

But he knew, he remembered Vietnam  
He saw the forest and heard the noises of  
People chatting in the village smelled the pungent odors from human  
waste in the rice paddies of rice and fish cooking on wood fires  
He felt the anxious silence at night waiting to hear or see Charlie  
Waiting for the attack which happened in deadly waves  
of soldiers armed with rifles and machetes sweeping in from all sides  
and he remembered how many he had to kill that night  
the bodies piled up over the landing strip in the morning  
he saw Vietnam and the flames and smoke buried him in fear  
but he went around the floor maniacal in his orders  
they all left within minutes the elevators full with each load  
he said he would leave as soon as he checked  
as soon as he found everyone was safe  
everyone down the elevator everyone spit out of that tower  
through the streets away from the inferno  
away from destiny bearing down bearing hard into the giant arching  
over  
the tip of the island projecting to the world  
then he saw the forest again it was lit with bright orange flames  
from the bombs dropped by the F-4s

he saw the VC burning to death  
from the jellied gasoline scorching their skin  
and collapsing bones and flesh in front of him  
he saw the fires all around he saw them scorched by the power  
of God's vengeance burned in war by man  
he fell back  
the sounds crackling  
breaking trees from the heat  
the air sucked away  
he wanted to leave  
he wanted to get out  
but that was all there was  
that day  
in the jungle  
that day  
when the second tower was hit  
he felt the air go  
the heat and the smoke  
he watched the floor under him  
he saw the ceiling as it went  
he went down into the crashing abyss  
into the forest  
into the fire  
one last time

## XIV

Across the river they sat at their windows  
And watched

Some trembled, others stared, others bent over their ledges in awe  
at the destruction too shaken to feel, too stunned to listen

The top of the buildings shot up flames and smoke  
giant cigarettes against the blue waters of the Hudson

An old woman stared at the spectacle heat and smoke and light from  
the flames pouring up

A bonfire for the world the sky was swamped lower Manhattan in a  
cruel haze

Somewhere in her mind this women knew that her granddaughter  
pretty twenty-three-year-old with dark curls and an impish smile  
was there she was there because she knew it her daughter had told  
her weeks ago

she began to work in the buildings having found a way station until  
she would go to the other side of the world to teach young children

her grandchild adored her as she adored the beautiful girl  
one who her daughter had promised would have her a great-grandmother  
before she left the earth but now the smoke poured out over the sky  
and the buildings crashed screams were all around her  
enveloping her in a collective anguish

the President had been on television then disappeared  
his mighty plane cutting through the air with supersonic speed he  
was somewhere

national security protocol clicked into motion the government went  
underground as chaos reigned as thousands marched north from Canal Street  
as the city fell into the depths of raw tragedy closing down, its airspace  
covered by fighter jets its harbor guarded by a battle group

in hours war settled over the Eastern Seaboard  
from an invisible enemy from an enemy that had destroyed itself  
to kill thousands to kill the heart, the center of the West  
ripping New York into a thousand pieces  
breaking the UN, breaking the EU  
ripping into the sides the smoke touching the skin of Lady Liberty  
the air spiked with toxins the woman couldn't remember  
the name of the firm but she thought her child must be safe  
even as her daughter, and her son and all her nieces and nephews  
came to get her to hold her to protect her even as they drove to the church  
as waited her son-in-law and her grandson trying to get over to Manhattan  
to bring her back

## XV

He lives on the Heights  
All his adult life  
He moved there right after the Navy when he was twenty-three  
Now he is well into his seventies almost eighty  
Veteran of the Pacific War  
Where he served with McArthur he came home and he lived  
On the Heights overlooking the Harbor and lower Manhattan  
An artist he painted all his life  
Big seascapes from Newfoundland from the South Seas and Montauk  
All places he went with his wife who died some years past  
His paintings full of blues and greens  
With ocean and storms and wooden houses  
Naked women on the beach with children  
Brown women, white and red in the Navy he was an officer  
Landed in the Philippines and Okinawa  
Using his guns to bring the Marines  
Ashore he remembered the landings as if they  
Happened yesterday guns pounding the beaches until  
The sky was full of smoke then his Marines landed  
And he covered from his command ordering the guns to fire up on  
the hills  
But the boys went ashore and fell like  
Flies on those beaches the sand littered with bodies

Now he was an old man with thin spindly arms  
And wizened face he still painted from his easel  
Overlooking the harbor he painted the bridge  
Which he used to cross every day as a boy  
And where he walked with his young wife

In the spring and the summer in the forties watching the ships  
plow up the East River to the Sound  
or out into the harbor and through the narrows  
to the Atlantic the sea made him think of sex  
of passion, red lipstick and perfume  
on his sleeves, his lips lost in the feminine essence of a woman's tongue

But now with his canvases lined up neatly  
His pads and his tubes of paint, he etched the Twin Towers  
That day that morning when the sky split open  
He turned just for a moment and then he saw it  
Like a giant Roman candle he began his painting

But he couldn't he went down to the promenade  
And looked over the railing as the  
Two towers smoked in the distance he remembered Manila burning  
after the  
Japanese left the dead piled on top of one another  
And the dead on Okinawa American and Japanese  
Their faces caught with the stare of death  
Their bodies quick to putrefy in the strong tropical sun

Then there was Tokyo and Hiroshima and Nagasaki places he went when  
He was there on the deck when the Japanese warlords  
And the Emperor signed to surrender the empire of the Sun God  
to the foreigners whose mighty ships surrounded the harbor a show  
of strength to the vanquished who starved  
who were scarred and tortured from the bombings  
but he remembered what they had done to the Philippines what they  
had done to China and Korea and to his buddies who did not survive  
in their prisoner camps  
and he wasn't guilty at all in those days when he toured the Japanese  
homeland  
in a jeep with a pistol and a translator  
now he was on the promenade old man and a widower

and the towers came down he gasped and returned to his painting  
but he couldn't hold his brush  
instead he watched television mesmerized  
then he walked down again to the promenade  
looking at the ruins that he couldn't see  
but for the smoke rising from them

he knew of the thousands who went down with  
the buildings he knew several who were the sons and daughters  
of his friends he rarely cried he was too old he thought  
to cry opened your heart to God  
he told his neighbor and he wasn't talking since he  
lost his daughter twenty years ago  
he wouldn't talk after his wife was buried a decade ago  
now he was alone like the people who had gone down  
he was in his own solitude watching as city shutdown and mourned  
but he mourned too he remembered the dead when he was a young man  
when he was an officer and he commanded men to aim their guns  
high up on the hills to destroy the enemy  
annihilate him to do to him what he would surely do to  
his boys landing on the beach he remembered his wife and his daughter  
and he remembered the skyline before the attack  
and the tears came hot and flowing from his old eyes

## XVI

She loved her garden full of flowers, purple, yellow and red  
Azaleas and Forget Me Nots, Lilacs and Roses  
Soft dark red tomatoes and large green squash  
peppers and watermelons and blueberries  
She spent hours and hours all spring and summer  
All her free time planting, trimming, loving  
The flowers and the vegetables and the ferns and large maples around  
Her house encased the garden merged it with the house  
All full of more plants large cactuses and geraniums  
She loved the house and the garden which she had for now twenty-five  
years  
Raised three children her husband left  
But she still kept the house a shrine to her childhood  
When she rode horses cared for them like the gardens  
With her parents on the farm she first went to Manhattan when she  
was twelve  
Taking the train with her aunt across the horse farms and small towns  
and then the factories along the strip of the lower Hudson  
she marveled at the Empire State from the top she graced the world  
stretching over the rivers to Long Island and to the west where she  
came  
past the cliffs of the Palisades into central Jersey  
she had blond hair and the bluest eyes her aunt spoke of her with a  
bit of awe  
stroking her forehead in adoration in front of friends on the elevator  
and in the park across from where she lived  
the city called to her put a chill through her twelve-year-olds body  
stone engravings and marble gold trim and doors of solid brass  
buildings stood regal, paternal crusted with power with history

they ran the country and the world those buildings solid made of granite  
basalt and steel those buildings on the basalt of Manhattan  
bedrock of the ice age the avenues road up through the island  
to the forests upstate the Hudson worshipped the city  
the winds from the west and the south paid homage to the townhouses  
to the jazz clubs and coffee houses where writers and thinkers  
came from Europe from around the world  
she worked in her garden and in the towers  
taking the train across the landscape of New Jersey  
under the river to the trade center standing over the harbor  
giant boxlike pillars that dialogued with the sun  
that day she sat at her desk making do with figures  
with numbers on digital sheets she moved them with her fingertips  
while glancing at the Palisades remembering  
when she was seventeen driving with her boyfriend  
to the park along the river over the narrows  
the Manhattan skyline bursting lights shouting over the water  
towers scratching their meanings in the night  
and she remembered his slim muscular body and the strength of his arms  
and how it felt

and farther out on that morning she saw the church when she twenty-five  
her mother tying the clasp on her white lace wedding dress and the  
soft see through pink  
like her azaleas that her bridesmaids wore she remembered the boy who  
made love to her years before on that night overlooking the narrows  
and there he was cut sharp in his tuxedo his best buddies standing  
one by one  
like officers now she waited for her daughter who would marry in a  
month  
in the same church her ex with his new wife she alone and the other  
children and all her family and her son-in-law strong and handsome  
like the one she married  
she worked that morning waiting for her daughter to call waiting for  
more plans for the day when she would watch her first born at the

altar with the priest air ringing with the chimes of a new day and life  
her orchids would be her gift to grace her daughter's house  
that day she waited to go home to work on her garden  
to prepare for the celebration so soon and so sweet she thought  
she imagined her mind drifting when the plane hit  
when the flames burst and the lights went out plumes of dark smoke  
and ferocious heat  
oil exploding into balls of red and yellow the next month  
when they had her funeral her daughters and her son her flowers and  
orchids were everywhere at the wake pictures of the family all over  
the parlor bagpipes played as they went to the cemetery now she  
was just a memory the woman who made a beautiful garden who  
watched the world

## XVII

He loved sculpture majored in it in college  
With his big sensitive hands and the keen eyes that were the same  
As his father's he saw the figures in his mind  
Then with a chisel he worked for tens of hours for weeks  
Creating people out of marble pink alabaster, royal green, chartreuse  
and yellow stones quarried in Italy and sent  
to his loft in Brooklyn  
at art shows the figures stood out brilliant bold shapes of hands,  
arms, shoulders, long jaws, voluptuous hips, breasts, long fingers  
and lips that looked like they could speak  
*"Michelangelo,"* the other students said not in sarcasm but in studied  
respect  
he captured feelings with his hands and eyes made them three  
dimensional  
bold and eternal for stone would last for thousands of years  
he filled his loft with sculpture and sent them to galleries in New York  
and Paris this he did for a number of years  
till his late twenties when he met his wife  
a young woman with dark brown hair and eyes and the round hips  
and breasts that he made in his art she had a child  
and he took the fireman's exam like his father  
he needed the salary and the benefits  
but he also looked up to his family who had served  
for now three generations his father and grandfather  
his two uncles and now cousins it came to him the same with ease  
with the naturalness that comes with a family trade  
he knew from long conversations camping on the end of Long Island  
and upstate near Canada from the dinner table  
when he was ten and eleven from hours drinking beer with his cousins

who worked with ladder companies in Manhattan  
he loved his wife and his baby boy who he played with in the morning  
after coming home from work took him to the loft where he  
still worked steadily, furiously his sculptures now in bronze, copper  
and steel big abstract pieces that captured the feeling in the urban  
spaces he  
knew so well commissioned for office plazas and universities  
yet he was still a fireman in his early thirties six two built like solid oak  
muscled like a Greek god his biceps his forearms chiseled  
from the ardor of work his wife made him pasta and shrimp with  
vodka sauce  
red wine and romaine salads with feta cheese and black olives  
with his cousins they went sailing on the sound and deep sea fishing  
in the ocean he loved the sun and the sky he laughed easily with his  
wife who worked  
as a nurse taking care of the newborn taking care of him and their baby  
his cousins were working that day he had come in from his shift  
ready to go home when the call came in—he went—loading onto  
the truck  
they raced across the Brooklyn Bridge to the buildings now filling  
downtown  
with giant clouds of dark smoke down came the civilians  
by the hundreds and the thousands dazed, brutalized by the scene  
he passed them going up the stairs he would go eighty flights  
racing with his hose having the strength to make it to the fire  
which he thought he would tame the biggest fire he would ever see  
he wasn't afraid as they came down past coughing and crying  
some passing out he and his buddies, his cousins  
they went into the building even as the first tower came down  
they stayed pulling the people down toward the bottom  
before that one too would go his arms and his hands as strong as  
Hercules  
he pushed his way through doors into the smoke  
he went to the fire to save his buddies to save the people who had  
not left

with the strength of three men he tried coughing, cursing, till the last  
moment  
when the structure broke like his statues fragmented  
a thousand pieces of white marble a thousand pieces of bronze  
a thousand pieces of polished copper a thousand pieces of stainless  
steel  
the patina cracking and then the air full of thunderous noise black  
smoke and dust  
weeks later his buddies watched the ones who had made it out  
the ones who had came later his friends and his uncles and his father  
his mother and his sisters and his boy they watched  
at night the sky was lit over ground zero  
two searchlights shot into the air massive beams of photons  
a sculpture to the dead he had gone into the ground  
but his soul remembered he walked through the streets  
of Manhattan walking across to his loft where he had his work  
where they divided it among the relatives and friends  
for safekeeping the strong stone sculptures  
with feelings that captured life with ideas transformed into  
muscles, faces and eyes he followed his work  
and his family his strength now in his spirit  
which settled around his home his life his love his passion

## XVIII

Two sisters they were born on a farm in Maine  
Overlooking a field where their father raised sheep  
Their mother kept house in a home without running water or electricity  
It was five years after the war after their father had come back  
From Canada pardoned by the president for refusing to serve  
He had gone to Harvard son and grandson of ministers  
with long red hair and a beard with piercing eyes he was a descendant  
of Brahmin stock  
on both sides his wife, who went to Bennington  
met him at Woodstock when they were both naked and stoned  
to the world traveled all around the country  
in an old school bus painted psychedelic went to India and Morocco  
to smoke hashish  
and learn Yoga came back for the final year of college  
while the campuses were being burned because of the bombings  
but then he was drafted he could have rated 4-F for his  
drugs and his beliefs but he took off to Canada  
his girl in tow they were the parents who brought the twins into the world  
each with thick curly brown hair each with the same bullet like dark eyes  
and they were beautiful those little girls wearing homemade peasant dresses  
at three when their grandparents came to visit from Boston  
they lived on that farm rosy cheeked and eager eating  
at dawn organic apples and raw milk with honey from the backyard  
they walked to school until they were eight  
when the parents sold the farm gave up on being back to the land hippies  
neophytes and pacifists they moved to Boston  
where Dad started to tinker with computers  
till he had a company with forty employees  
a logo and a duplex on Beacon Hill.

The girls took this with stride turning thirteen in private school  
Wearing school uniforms and dreaming of writing poetry, painting  
and living in Paris  
So they did, their junior year at Brown each going to London and  
Paris for the year  
With Italian and German boyfriends they were smart majoring in  
comparative literature  
They graduated that spring in 2000 still fresh and rosy from the time  
they lived on the farm in Maine still open to the world fresh and inviting  
Even with the advanced courses in literary theory the travels to Turkey  
and Egypt and Jordan even with all the urbaneness that came with  
their lives  
They were still farm girls even if their parents had long ago shorn  
their locks  
And given up weed and peyote buttons had gone straight as arrows  
They were close those sisters sharing everything between them  
Having been born just eight minutes apart with a midwife bringing  
them into the world  
Now they were twenty-three five-foot-seven with slim arms and legs  
Dimples in their cheeks and soft voices that made  
Men who never met them want to date them marry them  
across the country

they worked three floors away from each other both for the broker  
who rented those top floors high above Manhattan looking out a  
hundred miles each way on a good clear day  
they worked in different departments each an assistant for a different  
manager  
a high flyer who promised them a future they talked several times a day  
even though they shared a loft with two other girls in Hoboken across  
the river  
they would take the train in and the train out their parents proud of them  
came to visit every month bringing care packages  
flowers and loving kisses they adored their girls  
who never gave them the slightest trouble

in twenty-three years but for staying out late  
and using the cars without permission

each of them had a look effervescent, enchanting, seductive  
they loved the city double dating to jazz clubs  
going to poetry readings on weekends  
dancing at night until five a.m.  
wearing miniskirts and sleeping over on living room floors in Chelsea

all they could admire in their lives was in Manhattan  
full of galleries full of restaurants full of writers, and business men  
actors, film makers and producers full of languages and style  
they burned with desire to stay those Maine farm girls  
and so it was when their parents raced down to the city  
in their SUV driving a hundred miles an hour

down the turnpike trying to get into the city to the sight  
when they couldn't walking around in a shocked daze  
to each of the hospitals looking for their daughters  
but they said no one survived from those floors  
none at all they all had disappeared somewhere  
but their parents wouldn't believe that couldn't believe  
when they saw the towers go down they knew their children had left  
had somehow made it out of that tower before it imploded  
before they saw the face of terror inscribed around the world  
they wanted to believe they had to believe that their little ones were  
not buried in the ruins in the clouds of smoke and dust with oil fires  
burning for weeks  
they wanted to see their daughters fresh faced and beautiful  
as they came out of the towers to hug their parents  
to tell them they had not gone that the world was good and clean  
that they would live that they would see them golden brown-haired  
beauties  
for the rest of their lives

## XIX

He was a small man five-two with thin shoulders  
Barely a hundred pounds but that was about right  
From the province he came from people were poor  
They ate sparingly even today he came on a boat  
That almost circled the world stuck in the container  
With just enough oxygen they had granola bars and  
Water to eat sometimes with fish and rice  
And a little juice but that was all for two months  
Till they came ashore somewhere and trudged through forest and  
barbed wire  
Till a van came for them and drove them cross-country to New York  
That was eleven years ago he was put to work in a restaurant  
Because the smugglers needed to be paid  
He worked twelve hours a day seven days a week for seven years  
Cooking and cleaning in the back while the big fat Americans  
Ate their cheap dinners in the restaurant cheap for them with bulging  
wallets and credit cards the women with huge breasts the men with  
stomachs that looked  
Like they would explode it was hard to believe he had no time and  
nothing to do but to occasionally drink tea and speak his dialect with  
those from his province  
He wrote to his parents to tell them not to worry about him  
He worked that way till he was through with the debt  
He had his own room overlooking Canal Street and he saved money  
to send to his parents  
And to his brother and sisters it came time that he thought he would  
Be able to marry which he did a girl from his village  
Who worked in a sweatshop sewing ladies' garments in Williamsburg  
They both continued to work twelve hours every day sometimes

taking a day to  
Shop they knew only the city from below Canal Street to the river near  
The housing projects they saw the towers each day  
From their window it looked like a dream to them  
He had gone to the towers one day to go up to the observation deck  
But as he approached the elevator he sweated profusely  
His eyes blurring

“hey, are you all right man?”  
a tall black man, a security guard asked him.  
“you look like you’re going to faint or something?”

he was taken with the man’s concern  
who had never met him before  
just a small Chinaman with drooping eyes  
who only knew enough English to take the subway  
the man was strong, with large hands and big white teeth  
over six feet with large shoulders like stones  
“*you want to go up there?*” he motioned with his head  
looking up toward the observation deck.

He nodded. Though he didn’t know why  
Since he was not a citizen he was not a resident  
He was nothing but what he was  
He thought, Did he have a right  
To see America?  
To see what was past the water  
Which he hadn’t seen that time  
Eleven years ago when they pushed him into the van  
And they drove without stopping  
Till they came to the airless windowless factory  
Where he worked for four months  
Cutting fabric till they put in a restaurant where he still worked  
Where he thought the world began and ended  
He took the black man’s invitation rode all the way to the top

With white tourist girls in tiny shorts and bare waists  
With young men with wide shoulders  
And t-shirts with letters they laughed and giggled all the way up  
To the very top of the tower where they went to look at the view  
He saw it and his jaw locked the land stretched away from the city  
Its skyscrapers small below the towers the land instead moved out to  
the horizon  
Where he saw what looked like mountains  
And on the other side he saw the ocean  
Far in the distance where the whites had come from Europe  
And also the black from Africa crossing over the water to settle here  
To build this enormous and great city  
Where he thought he would now grow old and die  
He remembered his village where the land was old and tired  
the fields barely making enough grain  
the commissar worried about his village  
worried about him told him that day years ago  
that he should go to America so now he was here  
having not seen his village or his family since he boarded  
the bus to take him to the coast to the smugglers he  
gave every yuan his family had gave them seven years labor  
now he was standing above the city  
saw the buildings in midtown and the park  
the bridges and the rivers that snaked up one to the north  
another to the east he stayed until sunset  
where he saw the red glow of the western sky  
and thought he would fly home the next day he cleaned fish  
for the restaurant before it opened he went out to the back  
throwing the entrails into the large bin where he saw the back  
windows to all  
the buildings that bordered on the shopping street  
he saw it hit the tower like a giant bird  
it ploughed into its side exploding he stared  
disbelief over his face he left the restaurant  
went to gather with others looking at the spectacle

but this time he went his own way running down to the towers now  
both on fire and smoke filling the blocks  
the police stopped him a couple of hundred feet  
from the entrance told him to get back  
so he stood, terrified as the bodies flew from the air  
he shook with fear when it came down  
he ran but he fell to the ground slamming face hard on the pavement  
as smoking fragments of the building roared through the streets  
he would die he thought his wife would be a widow  
back in China in the old province  
where a television was a luxury his family would have nothing  
his said this choking on the dust  
on the debris which now covered him whole  
unable to move  
but a hand and then an arm grabbed him  
pulled him was he dreaming?  
An arm pulling him up from where? From whom?

The air was pitch black as he was pulled out  
Taken to a stretcher carried across to an ambulance  
He wanted to say thank you but he couldn't  
His words were stuck English it seemed had swallowed the blackness

“are you okay, man?”  
the black man said.  
Just like he said the day before  
Now covered with dirt and bleeding like him  
they smiled, recognizing each other  
Remembering thinking of the sky where he had gone  
Just the day before to look out at the city  
Looking out at the sun glowing in the west  
Remembering he placed his hand on his shoulder  
“thank you”  
*“thank you very much”*

## XX

He said he would protect her from now until the end of his life  
He wouldn't let anyone or anything hurt her so he said in his old  
fashioned vows  
Scuba diving off a coral reef they met by accident  
More than halfway around the world  
He was taking pictures with his underwater camera he bought at a  
specialty shop  
She had just arrived with her tour group  
Quite suddenly they were swimming around  
In the bright sun and blue ocean off the east coast of Australia they  
made it back to Sydney he with rolls and rolls of film  
She with a dark tan from the summer sun  
They ate steak and lobster and drank margaritas  
He from Wyoming and she from Tennessee  
Both living in New York both working on Wall Street  
Both on vacation both in their late twenties  
They danced the samba and the rumba  
Went horseback riding in the back country

When they flew back to New York they were a couple  
Dating and more dating with trips to the West  
To Tennessee to meet her folks  
To Cape Cod and Maine, Virginia Beach and the Carolinas  
Sailing and diving and to Paris and Italy  
Driving up and down the coast of Italy  
Through the French countryside they sampled wine and bread  
Cognac and Normandy butter went to London for work  
And went to the theater and up to the Scottish highlands  
Where his ancestors came in the eighteenth century

They bought a home in New Jersey  
Got married and then had two small children  
She retired but he continued his job selling international bonds from  
the ninety-second floor getting up in the middle of the night to email  
customers  
In Taiwan and Tokyo he worked around the clock  
A workaholic since he was a kid  
Growing up on a ranch where his father had him work all weekend  
And all the through the summer till he left for college in the east  
He went to Yale as an athlete he being six-foot-three with the long arms  
And feet on a sprint swimmer he competed at the NCAA  
Was considered the best the college ever had  
And had nearly a straight A average majoring in math and chemistry  
He had the all American looks of a true winner  
With an easy smile but a strong handshake  
Had the intelligent eyes of a thinker

His wife was thin and wiry like him with long straight brown hair  
Slim hips and very long muscular legs that she showed off  
in short skirts and dark stockings  
She married him without a second thought since he was nearly perfect  
and when the children came she stayed in their home which lay out  
in the woods away from the road  
In a semi-rural part of the state a new but wealthy suburb carved out of  
Woodlands and farms she liked to get in her car on a nice  
Driving day and take the babies with her to the city  
Zipping along the highway seeing a glimpse of the skyline in the distance  
Silver towers just over the horizon  
She would speed toward the Holland tunnel  
Parking in the garage and surprising her husband  
With the toddler and the infant he would break into a big warm  
paternal smile  
And his buddies looking equally masculine  
Would light up at the cute little ones  
And the fine looking wife who used to be one of them

That day he was hard at work talking with London  
Trying to make a deal with a client who trusted him in California  
He thought he had the deal his wife was at home watching the babies  
play in the back  
She would go the mall later and then with her husband go out in the  
evening  
Monday being an ideal night for the movies  
It was like any other day a good one he thought  
sipping coffee while he was on hold  
he heard the explosion the other tower smashed by something awful  
he ran to the opposite end of the floor to see it up close  
his friend worked in the office just a few floors above  
where the accident had happened he called his wife  
she was numb when he told her she remembered the first attack in '93  
when she just started to work in that same building  
how she walked down those flights of stairs in the smoke  
she told him to get out right away but he said they weren't going to leave  
that the second tower was fine and they didn't want to cause confusion  
downstairs for the firefighters  
she begged him something in her gut stuck at her  
like needles a voice came to her and she blurted out again  
for to leave "get out of the building!" she screamed over the phone.  
He was not listening to her he was watching something else  
And then the second one hit and it shook everything on his floor her  
picture crashing from his desk when she last heard from him he was  
heading for the stairwell  
She raced into her car giving the children to her neighbor  
She pulled out of the local road onto the highway and sped toward  
the city  
He tried his best to save himself to save his life so his children  
wouldn't grow up  
Without him so his wife would not be a widow at 34  
He pushed his way onto the stairs and carefully  
Moved down toward the smoke it was so hot he felt his back almost  
on fire

Sweat pouring down his back but he made down past the heat  
And gingerly but quickly moved toward  
The landing seventy floors down  
She didn't make it into the city because they closed the tunnel  
Instead she sat in her car looking at towers as they smoked  
Trying to reach her husband with his cell phone  
But the lines were not working having been laid made useless  
By the attacks she hoped more than desperately that she wouldn't  
lose him  
That he would survive he seemed to know that  
He knew that he was a survivor having done so many times  
Winter camping and mountain climbing in the Rockies  
He was as tough as they came he thought which made him successful  
on the street  
So there she was, standing outside of her minivan  
Three miles from the tunnel and the Hudson river  
Looking straight at the towers as the first one came down.  
It was her husband's tower but she made believe it wasn't  
She made it into the city  
And even when the second tower went down she still didn't believe  
He had not survived it so she waited all night and then another  
Till she had been up for three days till she was forced to go to sleep  
They took her back to New Jersey  
But the woman wouldn't stop her husband who wasn't afraid of anything  
Had to have found his way out of the building  
Before it went and even if he didn't he would have found  
A way, slipping into an air space protecting his body from the falling  
floors  
Of concrete and steel she knew her husband  
Who was bold enough to swim miles  
Off the coast with sharks in the water  
Who could cross a wilderness with nothing  
But a knife, a canteen of drinking water and  
His hiking boots  
"He made it," she told herself. He wouldn't leave her.

So she said, when she volunteered  
With the excavation, organizing food and clothing for the workers  
who labored in the thousand degree fires that burned for months she  
was there every night to be with him  
He had not gotten out even though he could have  
He had stopped when a woman had collapsed  
On the stairs picking her up when others told him to leave  
He carried her down the stairs but it was too late  
For the building came down fast moving against him before he could  
Figure out what to do he went down with the explosion of rubble  
His wife continued to work on the site  
Till they told her it was enough months later, she had lost fifteen  
pounds  
She went home to her small children looked up at the sky and saw  
her husband  
He had disappeared into the towers  
The ground had covered him with thousands of tons but she saw him  
up in the heavens  
Or so she said wanting to believe that he had survived the ordeal  
By becoming an immortal image an angel sitting in heaven protecting  
her

## XXI

The smoke filled the ground and the firemen and workers came with  
their cranes  
And water pumps wearing masks  
Digging into the rubble with search lights  
And sound detectors  
They stood next to each other  
Watching them work desperately  
That night after the attack

*“they won’t find our bodies”*  
*“we are buried too deep”*

they had worked together one desk apart for three years  
now that they had departed the same moment underneath the  
inferno they were standing together  
in the netherworld standing next to the living  
watching them they were at the very top of the tower  
the highest floor working as they usually did  
watching the view of the harbor, the city, the island  
and the Palisades watching the sky they saw the plane coming  
in just a few seconds they saw it turn and veer  
right toward them crashing below  
impossible to believe it crashed with such speed  
they didn’t have a chance like all the others  
crowding up toward the roof to be rescued  
by a helicopter which never came  
they died up there just before the building went  
now they walked together wearing the same clothes they had worn  
the moment they had succumbed

*“are ghosts supposed to be angry?”*

she said as they walked around the site  
she had left a husband and two children  
he too had left his family a wife and a child  
now they were gone spirits  
but still there, having been killed murdered  
they now walked the earth  
walked to find the murderers  
to find justice before they would leave

they had died many years before their time  
half a century at least  
half a century gone like smoke  
lost in the rubble  
lost in the thick soot covering the streets

like many of the others  
who they saw standing next to the living  
watching their friends search for them  
but now she was not going to stay  
an assertive woman  
in life and now death  
she told him she was going to find them  
to find the killers

*“and then what?”* he said to the girl, transparent and angry

she traveled away and he followed  
moving quickly over the earth  
they moved across the Sahara  
and heard the calls of the Imans  
listened to the Arabic prayers  
which they now could understand

existing on a spiritual plane  
they could listen and know  
any tongue any thought  
they moved through walls and kitchens  
through the basements and the outer walls  
through apartment towers  
and military fortifications  
they were unseen unknown

so it was the days after the attack  
they looked through walls  
through the floors and listened to the men  
gloating smirking at the attack  
at what had been done  
they traveled around their homes  
and watched as they met and discussed  
what was going to happen  
what they wanted to do  
the anger of these men  
seemed beyond measure  
so broad and vile  
hoping to inflict dire pain

*“how could they be like that?” she said*  
*“how could they be so angry, like animals,*  
*vicious and cruel, what could have happened to them?”*

when she was alive  
she had never had much sympathy for them  
knew nothing of them really  
but what she read on the way to work  
in the business paper

until the last moments of her life  
she had had an ordinary one

she had never risked anything  
was never truly inspired but to  
work and to be a mother

an accountant married to an accountant  
she had lived in the same town where she had grown up  
had married someone who she met at church  
and had not moved more than five miles from where she was born  
had sent her children to the same school she had gone to  
had bought a house that looked just like the house she had  
when she was eight now that she was thirty-seven  
the most she had traveled was to work  
she had been to Connecticut once  
and Philadelphia twice  
the man next to her, a coworker who died five seconds  
after her was not much different having been born and raised in the  
same town he now  
commuted from just north of the city he was an accountant too, a  
financial analyst  
who spent his days working entirely with numbers on his computer  
who never spoke more than a few words  
they were both nearing forty not quite middle aged  
but they had been robbed as they knew  
they were not supposed to be heroes  
in their lives they managed risks  
they reduced risks valuing safety and integrity  
honesty and reserve  
they did not make waves but now they were ghosts  
spirits inhabiting the space bordering the living world  
watching those who knew them some who loved them  
it seemed now that they would be tested  
after they had lost their bodies now they would see if they had  
the slightest courage between them to express what had happened  
to sense if they could not feel the power  
of the world so they looked for those who knew

who the living were looking for they found them deep in the countryside  
in the mountains and deserts in the underground bunkers  
they stood around them as they practiced  
as they waited for the air war to begin  
as they prayed hours upon hours for deliverance by God's hand

the woman remembered her father and mother  
when she was seven watching the news  
Vietnam spread a blackness a pallor over the town that summer  
As if theirs was a collective death and she remembered how her  
mother calmly  
serenely ignored the awfulness  
She didn't support the war, she remembered  
But she would not protest to go against the quiet certitude of having  
Voted for Nixon, having found a man who would appreciate her  
family's hard work  
Tragedy was only something she could remember  
From her grandparents who died shortly after  
who had been in Poland during the war  
who had suffered grievously, horribly  
at the hands of the Nazis who wanted to kill the Poles  
just as they killed the Jews who wanted to turn their country  
into a paradise for the Aryan race and place her grandparents into  
slavery  
or to starve or gas them to death  
she remembered those stories and because of that she had a keen  
sense of tragedy  
even though she worked hard to make sure  
life was ordinary in every way work and cookouts and meetings at  
the Roman Catholic church she had no gumption for anything  
but to be ordinary but to be normal he stood next to her as they  
watched the men  
brutal and savage kill a man in front of them  
slashing his throat he left his body quickly  
standing in front of them with bewilderment telling them

all that he knew of these people who had taken his life  
until the white light came and he was gone  
disappearing into the luminescence

When the bombing started  
A few weeks later they were still there  
Watching the gloating and the smirks for this was too much  
they moved up into the atmosphere  
and waited for the pilots to come over their targets  
then in a whisper they planted directions in their brains  
focusing with their global coordinates  
sending their thousand pound explosives directly on target  
guided not by computer chips as they thought  
but by the female ghost who communicated through  
their frontal lobes and through their fingers  
he was amazed at her his fellow traveler  
who had changed so much now that she was beyond the living  
she had now become assertive, impetuous in her drives  
wanting to make sure that the evil and the wicked were punished

but he questioned her. He asked her why she was doing it.  
*"they need to do this themselves, they can't rely on spirits  
to fight."*

He asked her to look around what they had seen to look at the villages  
without schools  
Without food or medicine he wanted her to see across the continents  
To the destitute they saw living with disease  
Living with nothing he made her look at the dead children in Africa  
In Asia and the Americas he made her look at the suffering  
He had changed too he had never taken risks  
But now he saw beyond his job.  
At night his spirit rose high up into the sky  
Watching and listening to the breathing of the souls on earth  
And he felt the dying and the starving and the pain

That spread across deserts and forests in mud huts and shanty towns  
On the sidewalks and in the garbage dumps where some of the poor  
Scavenged he saw all of this and she came with him  
Looking now over the entire earth  
And they now were more than ghosts from the towers  
They had been transported somewhere else  
Given a mission they didn't quite understand  
Until they were told until they learned that they were spirits  
Who had transcended the earth and the sky  
Had moved with powers that they never knew existed  
And now they were no longer ordinary  
No longer safe or normal

They moved across the sky that November as the bombing thundered  
with intensity  
But they weren't there they moved through the sky across  
The water to the vast lands of the continents  
In New Jersey and in New York their families had given them funerals  
And buried them in cemeteries where their relatives too  
Had gone but for these two souls the world sat below them  
And they did the work which was given, assigned  
Prying into the souls of people, men and women  
Testing the truths that come from life  
From the generations from the land and the sky and the water  
From the earth that watches the birth of children  
From the soil that buries the dead  
From the ground that holds them  
From the towers that were destroyed  
From the blood of the lost ones  
From the suffering of humans  
From tragedy and from joy  
They served the unity of all things  
Fire and ice, living and dead  
They moved through the center of the world

## XXII

They didn't know what had happened to him  
No one could know for sure since he was paperless unrecorded  
Without electronic or digital or typed records  
He was just anonymous officially  
But that was how it was he had a patronymic Garcia  
From a small village fifty km from the border where he was the  
youngest of ten  
His mother called "little one"  
Since he was twenty-seven years younger  
Than her oldest being born in her forty-fifth year  
He walked across the border  
Into Arizona and found his way  
North finally to New York where he sold food from a pushcart

After the towers came down he had gone disappeared  
Even though he didn't work there  
He went to see a girl who worked in the pizzeria downstairs  
He should have gotten out should have survived being at the lower level  
The food mall next to the subways but a month after he was simply gone  
Not in his basement apartment in Bushwick  
Not at his job peddling he was nowhere to be found  
And the checks no longer came but he wasn't on the first floor  
He was high up in the mechanical section  
Eighty floors up where his friend who worked for the building  
was showing off the machinery that kept the building going  
he sat up there with his friend an immigrant from Columbia  
who was a first rate mechanic and he showed him the air conditioning  
units that he was responsible for keeping  
cool air flowing up into the higher floors

his friend smiling told him that his job paid enough to buy a three bedroom house

in Queens where he lived he said that and Garcia smiled faintly trying to figure out how much it would cost to buy such a home but that was the last thing either man said the last thing they would remember

the last thing either one would be conscious of living on earth breathing the air and thinking just as his friend finished just as he stopped to let him talk

the tower was hit they sat twenty feet from the collision that blew a hole on that floor

the commercial jet disintegrating and exploding simultaneously they died within seconds so fast they didn't know what had just hit them

but he like so many of the others didn't just die

he didn't just evaporate he didn't go to heaven or hell

but he was there he found himself standing in front of the tower

a line of firemen arrived and began walking inside

trudging with their gear up the look flights of stairs

he didn't know what to think he realized that he was not what he used to be

he was there but separate watching but unable to be watched

his hands and legs weightless he moved straight through cement

when he tried to speak either Spanish or some English the sounds were faint

as if he was talking underwater but he was there and he thought why why had this been his fate?

He didn't work here he just happened that day to take a ride up to see where his friend who he played soccer with where he made his living where he a fellow immigrant

a Hispanic with few skills other than those in his hands

had made it done something to get this job

and now he had made it America

he had children who were going to college

two cars and money to fly back to his country  
just for that for the hubris of going up to a place  
he would never go but was invited  
just this once just this time and no more  
God had taken him in seconds  
no goodbyes no thoughts no ideas he had just been gone from this  
earth  
which he looked at now a ghost seeing the world like a television show  
a glimpse from the outside at the real world  
but it wasn't real at all he watched the fire engines  
as they arrived one after the other the ambulances one after the other  
he stood by the escalator watched the faces as they emerged  
watched the small muscles around the eyes  
but now he could understand what he never understood  
their thoughts came to him freely emotions now were objects in space  
connecting words he saw the images of their homes  
of everything about them  
how complicated the human mind it spins metaphors  
it traps words that become ideas  
concepts born out experience visual and auditory, olfactory memories  
combining, changing distorting recoiling, integrating, synthesizing  
rejecting, obscuring, shading, mobilizing and immobilizing  
conjectures, rationalizations, intuitions, denials  
suppositions, categorizations, the mind twists the world

and here he was Garcia watching the flow of the people  
some he knew from the minutes or seconds he served them hot dogs  
with sauerkraut  
knishes he cut open with mustard and ketchup  
moments he never remembered but now he remembered everything  
reality now becoming clear as a tinsel bell  
molecular pixels with trillions of colors they came out of the buildings  
some grasping some coughing shocked left single file each lucky  
that the towers  
stood while they exited but the ghosts kept coming

floating to earth from the top each one dressed as they were when  
they died  
bewildered lost in thoughts now that materiality had melted  
floated away they were but essence  
staring at the concrete at things at people who searched for their reality  
their sense of what could be explained  
from the inexplicable which shattered  
which exploded life becoming a cloud of terror a miasma of grief

Garcia who saw the world x-rayed saw people's thoughts as they  
floated out of their minds decided it was enough go home, the other  
ghosts told him

*“go home to Mexico to your people  
watch them move through their lives”*

so he did

Garcia he could have taken a bus or a plane or even flown high in the  
Heavens using the powers he now uncovered talents that he might  
have used

No Garcia walked back  
Just as he came walked through the New Jersey Meadowlands  
Through the Delaware Water Gap  
Into the mountains across the Alleghany  
Across the valley of Ohio to the flat farmland of the Midwest  
And south to the woodlands of Arkansas  
To the ranches and deserts and big highways  
of Texas where the sun became as strong as it was  
in Mexico and he walked over the river  
the Rio Grande walked up a mountain  
walked through the red beauty of the land  
to where he was born

## XXIII

He loved the beach where he did most of his thinking  
writing came easily on that cold ocean that sprayed him  
With mist as he walked for miles along the cliffs

It was a luxury having spent most of his time  
The last thirty years as an administrator running to meetings and  
more meetings  
The world even in academia had turned into a giant corporate steel plated  
Pressure cooker felt the stainless hard surface  
Every day when he met with the dean or with department heads  
Trying to figure out budgets, regulations  
That could fill telephone books for New York City  
Or greater Los Angeles now he had served his time  
had that wonderful house bought in the early '70s  
With his first wife now it was a palace of sorts  
An oak and cherry wood frame with gorgeous dark book panels  
large windows that overlooked a gorgeous Sonoma coastline

He had his den and his book lined study  
His wife had the living room and the bedroom  
And her study up near the attic and they had all the time in the world  
Now to write and write words measured on a sleek notebook  
Printed with a laser perfect brilliant white hard copy  
made work flow with the beauty of a fine cultured mind  
known for literate prose for irony and detachment  
He was thoroughly totally immersed in his element

That day  
When he awoke very early at a quarter to five

ran on the beach as always three miles heart and legs feeling the  
Sand dig on his heels but it was good it was great just sixty-three  
Now still young enough to write to create to have a forty-two-year-old  
second wife  
Who he made love to with deft abandon

This was his time his children gone, grown and married  
Retired and at ease everything of life now fit perfectly  
everything of one piece his shoulders tensionless  
his eyes unstrained he walked into his house  
brain brimmed with endorphins  
and the phone rang from the east coast  
from the number where his brother worked  
he answered  
he had been there only once to his office high above the city  
where he managed two hundred people  
where he his younger brother took command  
he thought of the times when they were kids  
growing up in Colorado camping how up in the Rockies  
where they could see nothing but a vast expanse  
of thick tall pine trees he remembered their wrestling in the water  
and canoeing over white water thinking they were going to die for sure  
he and his brother rode horses with their father  
over the old trails cooked bacon and eggs on open fires  
while Dad told his grandfather's stories of the Indians and the settlers  
of what it was like to be a real pioneer now they had gone a long way  
since then  
gone around the world several times he served his time in the Army  
in Germany  
listening and transcribing the Russian language  
learned the Cold War from the bottom up from the teletype machines  
to the mimeographs  
all in his head with the McCarthy hearings and the high school bomb  
drills  
all came to him when he heard his brother  
who said he was probably going to die

he watched CNN, saw the first tower go then the second after he lost  
contact with his brother his mind went numb with the shock  
his wife standing there with a look frozen in time  
when the second one came down his mind raced through the Cold  
War  
inexplicably he thought in his delirium there was a connection  
that the CIA or the Army had done this but his mind turned upside  
down  
with four decades of history spitting out of him the traumas he  
remembered  
shot out of his mind with rapid speed as he they drove to the airport  
to find a way to get to New York JFK flashed in his mind  
Saw him lying in a pool of blood his own  
And his brother he died the same way  
He remembered his friend who died in a plane crash  
In Peru and he remembered the day that a President resigned  
Disgraced he remembered the bombing in Oklahoma  
And all the tragedies that stuck with him came into his mind  
Came to prevent him from processing his brother's death three  
thousand miles away

The next night he saw him in a dream he came as a ten-year-old boy  
A tiny child with light hair and hazel eyes he said he had left the  
trade center  
And had journeyed back to his boyhood back to a time where they  
were free  
Of the adult world which way so deeply pressed in on him  
And finally killed him at fifty-nine

*"What about your family?" he asked him*  
*"Do you worry about your wife?*  
*Your four children?"*

His brother would never forget them never leave them and be  
responsible for them

So he thought, from knowing him all his life he would walk through  
walls for his family

But the little boy didn't seem concerned he hadn't thought about it  
He didn't seem to care

*"Aren't you worried?" he asked again.  
"Please tell me you are worried  
Please tell me you will watch over your  
Family while you are in heaven  
And they still live"*

But the little boy just looked at him.  
He didn't know what all the fuss was about.  
*What family?* he said.  
*Do you mean Mom and Dad?*

Now he realized he was only speaking to a dream that it wasn't real  
That it was a message with some meaning he was processing in his brain  
The boy faded  
He tried when they finally flew to New York he tried to find out  
something anything  
It was months later but they found him his brother  
And they brought him to Colorado to be buried  
Next to his mother and father, his brother's wife and her four grown  
children  
Cried deeply as they buried him

He thought of his own death of what it would have been like  
To have been on the other side of the phone

That day to have been in the tower with his brother  
And all the people who worked for him would his life flash in front  
of him?  
Would he understand what had happened?

When he went back to Sonoma, he still ran on the beach at dawn  
Saw the sun shine over the Pacific  
And he saw his brother most mornings  
He saw him high up in the sky  
Watching the sun as it came up from the east  
From the Rockies where he was born  
From New York where he died

## XXIV

He went to prayers every day as was his obligation  
He put on tefillin and recited the rituals that he had learned  
From his father and grandfather  
Had practiced every day since he was thirteen  
That day was like any other he went to minyan then went upstairs  
To his desk where he did his job  
In the secular world crunching numbers  
As he had also learned from his father  
But also from Yeshiva U

Learning to model the world  
With software that in milliseconds  
Calculated spreadsheets, datasheets  
Rates of return, investment ratios  
Taxes and expenses turning the numbers  
Finite permanent accurate the world moving faster and faster  
As the numbers came as he sent them emailed them  
The world was structured predictable

A Jew who observed the Torah his red beard was trimmed  
His spectacles small and gold rimmed a long narrow face  
With an aquiline nose long thin fingers especially dexterous  
His family had come after '45 from the camps  
they had barely survived he had four brothers and sisters  
And then each had children three to six  
So there was a brood of twenty grandchildren  
He with three little ones his wife a slender dark-haired woman  
Who also worked but in Midtown they lived in Brooklyn  
In Flatbush near Prospect Park

Where he walked with his wife often and to the botanical gardens  
Where they sat in the summer and listened to classical music  
They lived where they could be with their relatives  
Their community that celebrated and observed  
All the holidays on the Jewish calendar  
Being orthodox the world was defined by Torah by Kashrut  
By obligation and piety by respect and order for a world  
That Hashem created with immense powers  
Divined to the ancestors his presence and they kept the faith  
for now more than a hundred and fifty generations

now it was his time his duty to obey the law  
honor Hashem honor the Jewish people  
find truth and meaning joy and love  
by the Torah  
and this he did well he thought  
though the world was crueler  
than it should be he anguished  
about his cousins in Israel  
besieged he thought cruelly they had to fight  
every day for the right to live where God had sent them  
where they belonged he thought  
when the first tower was hit he watched with the others  
his nose twitched in cold fear  
amazement as he saw the flames  
thick dark smoke pouring out a mushroom cloud  
death undulating in the sky

*“they got us,”* he said in a loud voice...no one understood him  
he said it couldn't be an accident no way they hit the tower just like  
in '93

he immediately announced he was going downstairs going outside  
to see it to bear witness when he reached the ground floor  
he heard a tremendous explosion then moments later flames ripped  
around him

fuel igniting down the elevator shaft burned  
people alive a women in flames collapsing  
then he was standing outside  
watching as his tower and his office burned  
watched for forty minutes till the shattering power  
the avalanche sent him running like the others

he walked home to Brooklyn over the bridge  
dazed and speechless calling the home of the president  
who survived not being there  
he asked if he should go uptown  
to the small office but the boss was speechless  
then told him that there was no one  
“*no one?*” he said

it hit him that he was the only one the only person who went downstairs  
who saw both towers engulfed he and the others those who were gone  
away off site who had the luck to have missed that day at work  
those were left at Rosh Hashanah  
his eldest son told him he had survived because he was a Jew  
because he was faithful to the commandments  
Hashem had protected him from harm  
But his daughter a year younger asked if  
That were so why did Hashem kill the six million?  
Why did he leave his people in Poland  
And allover Europe?

He didn't answer either one of them  
He sat thinking he had prayed more than before the day  
Of the tragedy the day his friends died  
He had walked sixteen miles on the Sabbath  
To the funeral of his coworker a Christian who had a wake  
It was Shabbas but he still went he went even though he was told  
He shouldn't that it was not right to walk that long  
To go to a funeral, a Christian one

But he went walking six hours from Flatbush  
To Garden City drinking only water

And he dreamt that night he was back in Poland  
In his parents' city Lomza  
German soldiers massing around him with tanks and machine guns  
Then he and the remainder of the town  
Seven thousand of them were marched outside of Lomza  
Jews and Poles who had remained  
Scared and starving in March the Germans having taken all the food

They made them dig trenches and then he heard the shots  
And felt a bullet hit him in the thigh  
They all fell in the ditches most alive and they buried them  
Thousands on top of each other  
The dirt suffocating he tried to claw his way out

then he was gone the holocaust left  
moved back into ancestral memory  
now he was on a plane one that had left Boston  
one that carried its passengers  
straight into his tower killing them killing everyone in his office  
tearing out the heart of the people  
burying New York in pain he sat on the aisle and watched the leader  
with dark menacing eyes armed with a knife he held to the throat  
of a flight attendant a girl no older than twenty-five  
petrified ashen with fear he said he would kill her  
if anyone moved if anyone challenged him  
the passengers thought they were  
flying to Kennedy flying to refuel  
then to the Middle East but he knew he knew they would crash into  
the tower  
he gazed at his thin arms thought of the book of Judges  
of Samson and his arms now were like steel  
before he could think he had attacked

the leader whose eyes fixated on his neck  
taking the cutter to sever his artery  
but his strength like Shimshone of the tribe of Dani  
Hashem had given him power of a thousand men  
he grabbed him tore his arm till it ripped off  
he ran up to the door to the locked pilot's cabin  
his shoulder breaking it down the pilot who spoke only Arabic  
looked at him with awe fear tightening around his throat  
eyes fixed on him the plane went down  
a hundred and eighty degrees full speed it hit the water  
disintegrating its impact sending waves to the battery  
to Staten Island and Jersey they searched for weeks  
looking for the bodies but they had no luck  
the currents had taken them out to sea his colleagues didn't know  
what had happened to him they survived in the tower that had not  
been hit  
the one that stood while the other came crashing down  
he had disappeared his family sat Shiva assuming that he had died  
assuming it was he who had saved the tower

## XXV

They came down the two of them one after the other each hitting the  
concrete

With a thunderous noise

Made of the same cloth the same ilk

The same Karma one was Sioux

one was Bengali they knew each other

vaguely from years ago at Yale in the '70s

now they were famous victims of the Trade Center

on the day it was destroyed

they were parallel in so many ways the Sioux and the Bengali

parallel lives working their ways through time

they had checked into the same hotel the one at the towers

their rooms miraculously facing one another on the same floor

they each opened their doors in the morning

at the very same moment precisely

walking into the elevator they glanced at each other

a slight nod of recognition though they couldn't quite place it

each flew into New York the Sioux from Seattle

the Bengali from Boston to attend the same conference

breakfast at Windows on the World

each had the same kind of suit Armani soft shoulder

Wore black Italian leather shoes with gold Rolex watches

Their wives were both white tall and slim with light blue eyes and  
brown hair

From New England were both partners in software companies

had the same dark olive skin had the same strong noses, large dark  
eyes and jet black hair

The Sioux stood six-two and a half the Bengali just over six-three  
barefooted

*"Were you at Yale?" the Sioux said.*  
*"Yes I was. You do look familiar."*

the Bengali graduated in '76 magna cum laude  
in political science the Sioux graduated in '74 cum laude in history  
they lived briefly in the same dorm  
they each had two children a boy and a girl  
they each were divorced once and remarried  
they each drove Acura Legends  
they each had the same kind of dining room tables  
their wives used the same cookware  
their homes each had Jacuzzis  
with sliding glass doors that overlooked a valley  
they each had the same cell phones, DVD players  
and laptops with same megahertz and screensavers  
Each had written their senior theses  
On the political economy of the Third World  
Each had dated while in London a dark-haired model named Chloe  
Each had been called an "Indian bastard" by a drunk Irish janitor in Boston  
both read the *Economist*, the *New Republic* and the *Financial Times*  
both honeymooned in Tuscany in June  
chatting on their way to the conference  
they sat together at the breakfast and waited to listen to the speaker  
their friend who organized the meeting  
they both knew him from business dealings  
they both played golf and liked to drink Johnny Walker Black  
they didn't know what had happened when the plane hit  
they thought something had exploded below them but they weren't sure  
as the flames and smoke engulfed the top of the tower  
they ran up to the roof but when the helicopters didn't come  
they had to decide if they wanted to die up there  
and together they decided they would jump

rather than be burned alive which they did the Sioux first  
and the Bengali followed the Sioux remembered his life  
growing up dirt poor on a reservation in South Dakota  
at the age of nine he was arrested for stealing from the  
reservation store a hundred and twenty dollars worth of merchandise  
including 2 cans of oil paint, 50 pounds of powdered milk and six  
cases of soda pop.

He was sent to the reformatory that bad Indian boys always were  
sent to

And there he would languish, or so he thought, until he was old enough  
To leave and drink his way through life

But a miracle happened he took a test with squares and circles and  
Was told he was very intelligent maybe a genius  
Even though no one thought a Sioux boy in those days  
Could be one a few weeks later he met his benefactor  
A short man named Halpern who they said  
Was a millionaire from New York  
He had a hunched back and half of his teeth  
Glistened with gold fillings but he was a very wealthy man  
Who had made his money selling women's dresses  
Now he had come they took the boy aside  
Told him he was going to the East Coast  
To a beautiful private school in Connecticut  
Where he would learn refinement

This he told his mother  
Who looked at him quizzically never  
Having heard in her life that word  
“refinement? what does it mean?”

“Oh, I don't know for sure, mother.  
I think it means having the ability to talk  
To the whites.”

She took this to heart and signed the papers  
Sending her son whose father was dead  
To the boarding school in the east  
Where he would learn “refinement.”

Halpern paid for everything, including a tutor  
Who helped him for the first two years to catch up.  
He paid the tuition and for books, clothing and even  
Extra money so he could go into town.

The Sioux became a teenager, going to another school  
Called Exeter where he graduated near the top

He went to Yale, for the reason that they begged him to come  
That he was one of the only American Indians that they had  
And so he went growing his hair long, running nude, and smoking weed  
He refused to register for the draft  
He wrote tracts about Marxism and the Third World  
Demanded justice for all tribal peoples  
He did this with the verve of a convert, a true believer  
Went home to the reservation, which was already in action  
Against the government, holding the Black Hills captive  
He demanded justice

The Bengali grew up differently  
but he too became a fierce radical  
His family raised him on a jute plantation near the border with East  
Pakistan  
They were wealthy, descendants of royalty  
They owned huge amounts of land  
And he was a privileged child until he too was expelled from school  
For stealing

He was sent to boarding school in England his parents  
Not trusting him he went to Eaton

And then Yale studied English lit first  
Then political science declaring himself a Marxist  
But soon he realized that he wasn't  
That he preferred to be like his father  
A business man went back for an arranged marriage  
Which he left when he discovered  
What it would be like to live the rest of his life in India

He came back to the U.S. and took his MBA at Harvard  
Where he discovered consulting and computers  
Worked for IBM and Apple and Microsoft  
Until he went back to Boston married a protestant girl from New Hampshire  
And proceeded to build his business from the bottom up

The Sioux did the same using his Yale degree augmented by Oxford and  
A master's degree from Penn and the connections that his benefactor had  
Before he finally kicked the bucket  
Buried in Brooklyn off the Jackie Robinson

So they were there together as the situation turned desperate and futile  
As they realized that they would die  
The Sioux told the Bengali  
He was a descendant of one of Sitting Bull's warriors  
A powerful chief who cut the arms and legs of the soldiers  
At Little Big Horn then disemboweled and decapitated them  
leaving nothing but the eviscerated torsos  
Leaving the battlefield with the enemy annihilated

The Bengali said he was the descendant of a powerful man, too  
An Indian officer who led a battalion of troops during the First World War  
Fighting at Verdun and the second battle of the Marne  
His great uncle, in fact, decorated by King George  
The Sioux said it was better to die flying through the air  
Than to be cremated here  
He wanted his family to bring him back for burial

In South Dakota to the land of the Sioux  
His friend said more or less the same thing  
That he would rather be buried  
As a Moslem by an Iman than to die without recognition here in this  
building  
Choking on the smoke they each flung themselves speeding to earth

## XXVI

They stood next to firemen  
Who guarded the rubble  
Watching their brothers look for them

two engineers, visiting who had not made it out  
A German and a Palestinian  
Ironical they thought to have died like this  
They knew each other well in life  
Now they stood together wandering the ruins  
The buildings should have stayed up they said looking at the devastation  
They said the building should have had sprinklers on every floor  
and heavily insulated beams that would withstand the heat of  
thousands of pounds  
of fuel from a large jet *"if they spent the money, if the code required it,  
we would still be living,"* the German said  
looking at his colleague who seemed to agree  
they knew, architects and engineers who built skyscrapers for a living  
who understood them like a farmer knows his animals  
like a horse trainer knows his stallions  
they knew the steel and the stone and the glass  
that put these buildings up looking formidable  
looking indestructible like the mountains like the continents  
but it wasn't so wasn't what the architects had planned  
honest men who built the towers not realizing then that a plane would  
crash  
so fast right into them  
ritual suicide was not that popular in the sixties  
they avoided the idea  
because it wasn't quite what they could imagine

but in the first year of the third millennium nothing could be discounted  
where reality and fantasy converged in the computer age  
now they stood ghosts  
lurking around the site of their violent deaths  
wondering when or if their fates would be resolved  
now they looked at the faces of the living  
at the tired and angry and trembling looks  
of the survivors and the rescue workers  
who drove themselves like old army mules  
to find them rescue them from the site at ground zero

all of this was more than futile there were no survivors now  
several weeks hence no one was down there but rotting corpses

recognizing a sympathetic ear the German recounted his life  
telling the Palestinian of his family  
of his town and the work of his sister  
who told of their collaboration their  
boisterous and enthralled Nazism  
pervading the town until the British soldiers arrived in May 1945

He was never proud of being a German he understood the power of history  
he could not deny what he most desperately wanted to forget  
obfuscate blur  
wanted to forget to reconstruct  
to build his identity from scratch

the Palestinian did not have the problem of the German  
he spoke of the decades all his life that his people  
had fought for their homeland  
fought even though they had become pariahs  
he thought of his family in Ramallah  
thought of how much they would miss him  
grieving for the loss of their son

so proud of him and his family the children  
his wife how they now suffered  
how he wished he had not been at that meeting  
if he had only had the meeting the day before  
or scheduled even a couple of hours later  
he would still be with his wife his daughter his son

he was ashamed the Arabs had killed him and the thousands of others  
ashamed when now it did not matter if he was ashamed  
disembodied as a spirit inhabiting another dimension  
a vibrating string peering into reality

*do you really hate the Jews?*  
The German asked  
*Do you really blame them?*

The Palestinian said no...he didn't hate anyone when he was alive  
Nor did he hate now...hate had carved itself into his land  
Into his body but he had learned  
From his long years in Europe and the United States  
In his time working all over the world  
Humility and grace cherished by Muslims and all people  
Connected to God connected to spiritual things

He told the famous story  
In his family of his grandfather and his brother  
His great uncle was a leader of the Palestinians  
In the Thirties and the ambassador unofficially to  
The Third Reich he came back to Jerusalem in '39  
With a large picture of Adolf Hitler  
And every day until the end of the war  
He would kiss the picture kiss Hitler and condemn the Jews  
The Jews as evil as deserving their fate, their annihilation  
his grandfather, a scholar and a lawyer refused to accept his brother's ways  
He told him that

*“God does not bless murderers  
God does not cherish the destruction  
Of war or the death of the innocent”*

His great uncle was killed by a bomb  
When he rode in a car with the British  
Just before the end of the mandate  
His legs blown off by the bomb planted  
Underneath of gas tank he died in the hospital without his limbs  
And his penis  
His grandfather did not die that way  
He sat at his desk when the shooting started  
Sat and stayed there for days weeks  
He was forced to leave his house by the Jews  
Who took all of Western Jerusalem for themselves  
But he survived writing books and demanding  
The rights for the Palestinians for the rest of his days

They wandered toward the water at the end of the park  
Looking out at the Statue of Liberty the lady looked like she always did  
Guarding the harbor her power in her presence  
Set on the torch that she held  
Claiming to the Verrazano Narrows  
And the Atlantic the idea that inspired them  
Made them forget made them think  
looking out at the waters the strength of the thoughts of spirits of ghosts  
Holding freedom so grave and dear  
Holding life so fleeting and precious  
Holding virtue in their hands  
strong hands they could no longer feel  
strong arms they could no longer use  
only their minds floating through space  
only their eyes that could still see  
only their minds that could bear witness  
together they watched the water

## XXVII

She hadn't snapped out of it  
Six months later  
Beautiful woman five-seven blue eyes gorgeous  
Dark-haired with the face of a twenty-two-year-old  
but in her late thirties  
she worked late that night keeping her father's firm  
afloat with corporate law she worked twelve hours a day  
but on weekends her boyfriend  
slim tall dark-haired handsome  
with a touch of silver drove his jaguar  
down the LIE to a dune road in the Hamptons  
his house overlooked the ocean that swallowed the horizon in blue  
in June white sands sparkling in the midafternoon  
but soft in the shadows of cold sunsets in January  
his weekend house with six king-sized beds  
with long tables, wine bottles and scotch  
flat panel displays and abstract prints  
they lived the weekends in the winters flying to the Caribbean  
and to Spain and Portugal and Scotland  
she loved his tanned skin and soft hands  
his lips which touched hers  
he was in a meeting that morning  
in the tower she was in midtown ready to call him at ten  
but before that could happen  
she was tapped on the shoulder  
her assistant said to go into the other room  
where the TV was on she had met him five years ago  
at a party on the island he was divorced with a child  
but he was available and she fell for him

her world was him even though she was a lawyer  
a partner who managed the firm's practice  
who graduated top her class from Penn and NYU Law  
she never stopped thinking about him  
never thought of anything else with the same intensity  
when she saw the television she froze her eyes fixated  
a colleague gently put her on a couch  
as they watched but she was not there  
not processing she woke up hours later  
they told her that he was missing  
he had called her office they said he was making his way out  
down a staircase not to worry  
but that was hours ago his cell phone wasn't working  
she did nothing but went home and went to sleep  
speaking to his parents and his brother  
who came to see if they could find him at the hospitals  
but days after and there was nothing the hospitals didn't have him  
the recovery effort became salvage  
she slipped back losing twenty pounds off her frame  
then she stopped talking entirely antidepressants had no effect  
they took her to a psych ward her parents wouldn't commit her  
instead they took her out to the country to a private facility in New Jersey  
they looked after her  
each day her best friend came with fresh flowers and read poetry to her  
music and art therapy had little effect the drugs which they pumped her  
made her eyes glaze over catatonic they said

she had frozen out the world he had died that day as the tower came  
down but like the others he was there his image and his soul walking  
the grounds of the center  
he did find his way uptown to her apartment which was empty  
went to her office and made papers disappear but she was already  
gone when he found her at the facility feelings overwhelmed him  
they were privileged  
but he knew about loss about tragedy when he grew up with grandparents  
in the Bronx survivors of the camps they owned a candy store bought

with the money

the German government had paid them in recompense for their starvation and near death for seventy-five relatives lost burned in crematoriums his father drove a taxi working seven days a week his mother was ill tubercular from the years she lived in Siberia

he grew up working in the store his grandfather selling newspapers, cigarettes and cigars

his grandmother making omelets, scrambled eggs and buttered toast for the customers

he went to City College in the '60s majored in accounting even when the campus was papered over with black power and weathermen slogans the government drafted him and without thinking about it he went his father telling him that he needed to serve his country the army made him an accountant tabulating the costs of military aid

to the Republic of Vietnam he did his job well came back from Vietnam was spit on but he took it in stride his grandparents selling the store in the Bronx moving to Florida his father dying of cancer and his mother too he buried himself in work becoming a consultant then a broker making himself rich but his first wife left him took his kid with her he was destroyed unable to smile for years till he met her she nursed him back to health with her soft voice and delicate hands now he saw her frozen in time her jaw locked a feeding tube in her arm he moved into her putting himself inside her mind where she was walking on the beach with him his arm around her shoulder he stroked her forehead kissing her ears telling her he was going to be with her for the rest of their lives she kissed him deeply said she loved him that she wanted him more than anything more than life itself the next day the tube was taken out they called her parents who were told her heart had stopped her brain flat-lined he had moved through her body

moved through her mind embracing in the interior reality he took her with him took her through time took her through all the dimensions of the universe

so she stayed on the beautiful white beach

living in the house that he had built

overlooking the dunes and the ocean

## XXVIII

He knew Brooklyn like the back of his hand  
Growing up in Red Hook  
He would play stickball Basketball running from  
One ball field to the next  
When he was seventeen he and his cousins from North Carolina  
drove an old Chevy  
Cruising down Fourth Avenue and down ocean all around the borough  
He spent the first eighteen years of his life in the alphabet and twisted  
streets going to public schools Kindergarten, elementary school,  
middle school, went to Brooklyn Tech

Left the borough no more than once or twice the world was Brooklyn  
Even as he saw almost every day the skyline across the river  
He remembered sitting on a pier next to the Navy yards  
Watching the World Trade Towers as they rose above the sky

But he was all Brooklyn all black  
Fighting with the Italians and the Irish kids  
Who almost killed him once  
He was lucky incredibly lucky he never  
Was arrested since that might have taken him out of the Marines  
Which he joined in '72 right out of Brooklyn Tech  
He went to college through the corps even as he guarded the American  
Embassy  
In Saudi Arabia and later went ashore in Grenada  
To fight the communists creeping through the islands  
Bringing Lenin to the Caribbean  
When he left the Marines he came back to Brooklyn  
To his mother's apartment in Red Hook

Drugs flowed like cider and fifteen-year-old girls with babies  
filled the outdoor benches  
in '82 he joined the NYPD who liked him with his military skills  
with his sharp mind honed by learning Arabic and Russian  
he made detective easily after breaking into crack houses  
with assault rifles, sawed off shotguns and fragmenting bullets  
he survived was decorated and married a  
black woman school teacher who taught English in Bedford Stuy  
he always thought he was tough and strong especially that day  
when he was a block from the towers  
when it all started he ran into the WTC  
his detective badge flashing he ran up the stairs supervising the evacuation  
when the first tower came down he was still in there with the firemen  
holding his position with a walkie talkie he looked up at the  
thunderous mass and he prayed

his funeral attended by three thousand uniformed  
and a thousand detectives the mayor who knew him  
his congressmen, councilman and state reps,  
all gave condolences all spoke of his  
tenacity, loyalty, skill, compassion  
his willingness to do anything his name was good  
he walked through the ruins thinking now about what he had missed  
when he served his country he stood like a rock before the embassy  
not moving a muscle for two years  
he had come from people who had nothing  
sharecroppers from Alabama  
who lived in shacks in the forties  
until the city built the projects  
where they lived where he grew up

he used to walk the city as a detective  
a black detective that people would not notice  
he was invisible except when he wore sweats  
or a denim jacket when he was feared for his blackness  
his rough features with big hands and feet

they feared the large black man thought he was going to kill them  
he missed the soft easy life that he found in the suburbs  
and on the Upper Eastside where he cased the luxury buildings

*“you are no longer a nigger,”*  
another ghost said to him  
*“when you die your skin color*  
*becomes past tense. Now you*  
*walk the earth as a spirit*  
*but we spirits aren’t particular*  
*about race or color or even religion*  
*how could we be?”*

He wandered through the site  
Spoke to the German and the Palestinian  
Who sat next to the water  
To the firemen who went to the Middle East  
And to Washington  
To secretaries who died upstairs  
And the brokers who no longer cared about the stock market

*“they’re going to build a great big memorial to us*  
*it’s gonna list all our names and where we came from*  
*and our families are going to come here and cry*  
*but so what? So what if they cry. It changes nothing”*

he spurned the others  
they told him not to be bitter  
that the bitter ones would probably never leave  
his emotions would tie him to the ground  
to the earth and he would sit in the shadows  
of the buildings and the lives of living beings  
would pass around him

did he want that? Did he want to stay around  
To watch children grow into adults  
And have their own children while he was nothing  
Not a black man anymore not an African American proud  
Of who he was but the memory of one  
Bound the earth for eternity  
As the memories of the trade center faded  
He would remain staring out at the scene of the crime he would  
never solve  
staring out at his memorial, his memory  
at the long dark shadow of a black man

## XXIX

In the small town in Nebraska  
Where she grew up there was nothing or so she said looking out at the  
Rolling hills and the grasslands turned into cornfields and ranches  
For cattle there was nothing but her high school class of 38 students  
And the local movie theater packed  
Every Saturday night her parents never went to the movies  
Never watched television they worked eighty or ninety hours a week  
Keeping the farm in shape and in business  
She had to do four hours of chores in high school  
Even when she also was a cheerleader  
So she went to school in Florida away from the dull and placid prairie  
Where the Lutheran church warned against  
Sexual intercourse and against all the vices  
She went to the Sunshine state to major in what they never had  
What was forbidden in the walled lands of the prairie where her  
parents read the bible  
And nothing else she was five-eight with blue eyes

That day living in the West Village  
But working in the tower having succeeded coming to New York  
And discovering her true self discovering her sexuality in the vanilla bars  
At four o'clock in the morning  
She looked straight with her blond hair and round face the blue eyes  
saucer like  
She smiled and laughed heartily eagerly all the time at work  
Charming through the phone when the plane hit she ran to that side  
of the building  
Watching the flames as they crept upwards  
Believing until almost the last moment they would be rescued

But then finally she called her lover  
Leaving a message on the answering machine  
Of their loft where they hoped to have children  
She loved her she told her that  
When they had her funeral  
All her friends with their partners  
Came to the site they had picked  
A cemetery overlooking the Hudson

Her family from Nebraska met her lover a handsome woman who  
practiced medicine  
she thought they would reject her  
that she had taken their daughter  
a beautiful girl turned her into a dyke a lesbian  
who loved the wrong sex  
who disobeyed the word of God  
who brought shame to them  
brought humiliation that their daughter  
would not raise healthy children who went to church  
who would live with her family in the farmlands of  
their people who had come from Europe a hundred years before  
with bibles and gold to buy the land they held sacred  
the daughter had left them to live in the city  
to live in Bohemia wearing skirts and makeup  
but at night and on weekends her jewelry  
pierced her tongue and her breasts  
wore thick lipstick and heavy perfume  
made love all night  
tongues and clitorises rolled together  
in the caverns underneath the meat district

but they didn't  
they came from Nebraska in a blue minivan with fresh fruits and vegetables  
and pies they had baked peaches, rhubarb and blueberry  
they brought their daughter's favorite

and her bedspread and books from her room  
they gave this and her jewelry in the box next to her bed  
they gave this all to her lover  
told her they wanted her to have all of it that her daughter had never  
been more happy  
more lovely and content than with her  
and they blessed her remains  
lowered into the coffin  
that October they read the Lord's Prayer  
and her lover and her friends cried the air that day was very cool and crisp  
like the morning when it happened the sky soft and misty  
it was a perfect day

## XXX

On the night of the equinox  
The ghosts of the towers and the Pentagon and the airplanes  
Gathered all in the harbor of New York  
They went to the top of the torch the thousands of them  
Now angels awaiting the light that came from the sky  
Brilliant flowing light whose whiteness penetrated the oceans  
Making them transparent here they were and the narratives  
Strung across the sky spoke  
History walked through the oceans

For thousands of generations cities and villages and the first groups  
Who discovered speech and fire the ancestor of all humans  
Dark short and hairy a woman suckling her baby  
They saw all of this and the light carried them across the world  
Across the Sahara and the Himalayas across the Amazon and the Congo  
Through the forests through grasslands  
And the cities and suburbs where the world remembered them  
To the homes of their relatives to the homes of their friends  
Allover the world they went to those that knew them  
before the day when the world split fissured  
The world telling them in secrets in bare trembling words  
They saw their enemies who brought the towers down  
Who attacked the center of power who challenged the eagle  
Who challenged the strength of the people  
The strength of the nation which raised their flags  
Thousands and millions of them  
Burning with the pride its powers taking the world  
Now they watched the world walking into the homes of the hijackers  
To the beds of their mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers

Walking through the mosques and churches, temples and shrines  
Through Mecca and Jerusalem and Rome through the holy sites of  
the Hindus and Buddhists, they visited the shamans and the priests  
they went to the laboratory at CERN to Fermi Lab and Los Alamos  
went to Livermore and the factories that built microchips and nanochips  
the firemen toured the largest buildings the tallest ones in Kuala  
Lumpur and Tokyo  
in Europe and Latin America they marched across the world  
on that night of the equinox when the sun and the earth were centered  
when the world was in balance ready for the spring  
when all would be reborn in the growing seasons of the earth  
the thick soils of the American heartland would grow fields of  
cornstalks and wheat  
the land safe and replenished now the brokers and their assistants  
the managers and administrators receptionists and analysts  
the waiters, cooks and bartenders and the rescuers who died with them  
now they walked across the earth with officers and the soldiers and sailors  
flight attendants and pilots they followed the light across the earth  
as it illuminated as it brought them to the lives of humankind lost in  
the present  
to the sick and wounded to those who would leave  
without peace without wisdom without love without spirit or soul  
lost in the world that betrayed those who were destroyed  
buried demolished annihilated throughout time  
the firemen walked together wishing they could go back  
the others watched the horizon as the light came closer

